

New Canaan Mounted Troop **Super Troopers Therapeutic Programs**



Volunteer Handbook **2018**

New Canaan Mounted Troop
22 Carter Street, New Canaan, CT 06840
203-966-0634
www.newcanaanmountedtroop.org



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Welcome

Thank you for volunteering at Super Troopers! Volunteers play a paramount role in the success of this program. We value and appreciate the gift of your time and commitment. Volunteer opportunities do not require special skills or even an extensive knowledge of horsemanship; just the willingness to learn and the desire to work with individuals who have special needs. An in-depth orientation and training process is conducted before the start of each session to make your experience safe, enjoyable, and rewarding. This handbook is meant as a resource to guide you throughout the steps of being a volunteer here at New Canaan Mounted Troop. If you have any questions or comments, feel free to speak to the Therapeutic Coordinator, any of the Therapeutic Instructors, or New Canaan Mounted Troop Staff. We hope you have a valuable and fulfilling experience volunteering for the Super Troopers program!

History of New Canaan Mounted Troop

Mission:

“To build leadership, responsibility and confidence in youth through sound horsemanship and to enrich the lives of individuals with special needs through equine assisted activities.”

Established in 1939 as a chapter of the Junior Cavalry of America by Margaret Cabell Self, NCMT is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization devoted to building leadership, responsibility, and confidence in youth through a comprehensive hands-on learning experience. It emphasizes teamwork and follows a proprietary curriculum for sound horsemanship and equine care instruction. Activities are conducted in a family atmosphere and encourage community service, a feature rooted in its history.

NCMT gives a second lease on life and provides a home for up to 30 donated horses and ponies. Our equine friends’ average age is 18.5 years old, and they are the foundation of all of our programs. They come to us either because they need to step down from a competitive show career or because their owners can no longer care for them.

Captain Haley Miller (Class of 2012) describes NCMT as “Giving Horses a Second Chance So Kids Can Have a First.” It is a place where young people share their passion for horses, and in the process, discover the importance and reward of giving back to one’s community. Our horses and ponies are the vehicles for these life lessons.

In response to a growing need for equine-related therapeutic services, NCMT created the Super

Troopers programs in 2012 for children and adults with special needs in our community. To further our mission, Equine Care and Adaptive Riding Lessons are provided by PATH certified instructors and trained volunteers. Rebuilt in 2009, the barn is a state of the art, ADA compliant facility that successfully accommodates our Super Troopers students with physical, developmental, emotional, and intellectual disabilities. Your role as a volunteer is critical to the success of the Super Troopers program.

About PATH International

Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International (PATH Intl.), a federally-registered 501(c3) nonprofit, was formed in 1969 as the North American Riding for the Handicapped Association to promote equine-assisted activities and therapies (EAAT) for individuals with special needs. With more than 4,600 certified instructors and equine specialists and 866 member centers, more than 7,600 PATH Intl. members around the globe help nearly 62,000 children and adults—including nearly 4,000 veterans and active-duty military personnel—with physical, cognitive and emotional challenges find strength and independence through the power of the horse each year. In addition to therapeutic riding, our centers offer a number of therapeutic equine-related activities, including hippotherapy, equine-facilitated mental health, driving, interactive vaulting, competition, ground work, and stable management. More recently, programs offer services in human growth and development to serve wide-ranging audiences for such educational purposes as leadership training, team building, and other human capacity enhancement skills for the workplace and for daily use.

Through our certification and accreditation programs, plus a wide variety of educational resources that includes an annual international conference that can attract close to 1,000 attendees, the association helps members start and maintain successful EAAT programs. There are more than 55,000 volunteers, 4,666 instructors, 7,672 equines and thousands of contributors from all over the world at PATH Intl. Member Centers inspiring and enriching the human spirit.

New Canaan Mounted Troop is a PATH Member Center, and all NCMT therapeutic instructors are PATH certified. Our Super Troopers program adheres to program policy and procedures as set forth in the PATH Standards Manual.

Benefits of Therapeutic Riding & Non-Mounted Equine Activities

Physically, it is the horse's movement that has a dynamic effect on the rider's body. The horse stimulates the rider's pelvis and trunk in a manner that closely resembles the normal gait of a human. This movement can be used to produce specific physical changes in the rider including normalization of muscle tone and improvements in posture, balance, coordination, and increased endurance.

The horse and the riding environment offer a wide variety of sensory input to participants. Movement exploration on the horse combined with other sights and sounds one encounters in the riding program contribute to the overall sensory experience.

Emotionally, the success of overcoming fear and anxiety, as well as the ability to achieve riding and other related skills, helps individuals realize self-worth and increase self-esteem. For those involved with the various activities of a therapeutic program, the human/horse connection and development of new skills are critical components to the success of the experience offered. Relationships develop between participants, volunteers, horses, and staff and are an integral part of a positive, emotional experience provided by a therapeutic program.

Cognitively, the horse provides a strong motivator for participants. Riding lessons incorporate activities and games on horseback designed to reinforce existing skills as well as learn new ones such as the development of an effective seat, correct posture, leg position, rein aids, steering, legs aids, and transitions.

In our adaptive riding program, it is important to recognize that the horse is held and not led. The student is taught to ride and is not just taken for a ride. In our equine care program, the student grooms and learns various tasks associated with our horses and the farm.

Socially, equine therapeutic programs and associated activities provide an excellent opportunity for participants to interact with their peers, program volunteers, and staff in a positive and enjoyable environment.

Volunteer Program Policies and Guidelines

Communication & Questions

Without volunteers, therapeutic programs would not be able to function. Volunteers are an integral part of the program experience. Your time and commitment are invaluable to us. If there is ever anything that makes you uncomfortable or uneasy during program, please let us know; hopefully we can alleviate the discomfort. We count on you to be sure that each participant is having a positive experience, as we cannot be with each student individually. We also look to you to alert us if you see a problem, or if you're having difficulty. Please don't be afraid to speak up—we appreciate and value your input.

Time Commitment

As a volunteer, the amount of time you commit to our program is up to you; however, once you have decided the amount of time you can give us, we need you to be reliable and dependable. Ideally, we would ask for a minimum commitment of two hours per week for the full session (usually about 8 weeks). For reasons of safety we need a specific number of volunteers per rider. In addition, to provide consistency to our students, we prefer to have the same volunteers working with our students each week. This minimizes distractions and helps our lessons to run more smoothly. If you cannot attend your assigned lesson(s), it is essential that you notify the

Therapeutic Program Coordinator as soon as possible! If we do not have enough volunteers, we are not able to conduct class safely for our students.

Orientation/Volunteer Training

Volunteer responsibilities can include greeting students, horse grooming and tack up, side-walking, leading, arena activity set up, untacking, grooming, and cleaning tack. Orientation and training are provided on-site before each 8-week session. If you have no prior experience, this is a great way to learn by working with our PATH certified instructors and trained volunteers. Our two-hour orientations include: a lecture explaining basic horsemanship and important features of working with a student with disabilities; a hands-on exploration of the role of side-walking/leading for therapeutic riding; and a discussion on the role of the volunteer during an Equine Care class (on ground only).

Attending an orientation is mandatory for each new volunteer in order to create a safe and comfortable experience for both volunteers and students.

Volunteer qualifications

First and foremost, our volunteers need to have the desire to make a difference in the lives of people young and old who have special needs. Our volunteers must be dependable, timely, and have a reliable means of transportation. They need to be in good physical shape, and for our riding programs, be able to jog comfortably for short periods of time. No experience is necessary; just the desire to learn!

Volunteer Attire

Proper attire while at the barn includes proper footwear; it is suggested that volunteers wear hard-soled shoes that offer protection. Volunteers should not wear open-toed shoes or sandals when working with or near the horses. Please wear clothing that can get dirty! Dangling jewelry is unsafe to wear during our programs. Please keep earring and jewelry choices simple. Perfumes can attract bees and other stinging insects and can trigger a reaction in sensitive riders. Please do not wear strong perfumes or colognes. In warmer weather, shorts may be cooler, but we prefer volunteers to wear long pants. Please remember that there are always flies and mosquitoes around horses.

Confidentiality

At New Canaan Mounted Troop, it is imperative that we protect the confidential information of our clients, our staff, and our volunteers. "Confidential Information" includes, but is not limited to: personally identifiable information such as surnames, telephone numbers, addresses, e-mails, etc., as well as the non-public business records of New Canaan Mounted Troop. In particular, medical information about clients, and information about their disabilities or special needs, must be protected as confidential information. Volunteers shall never disclose confidential information

to anyone other than New Canaan Mounted Troop staff. Volunteers must seek staff permission before taking any pictures or videos, and are prohibited from posting any photos, videos and/or information about our students on social media of any kind.

Reassignment and Termination Policy

NCMT policies have been developed to serve the best interests of the entire New Canaan Mounted Troop community. Safety, confidentiality, respect for each other; human and equine, and the preservation of an optimal environment to foster the human/horse connection in all programs are the primary reasons for strict adherence to these rules.

Individuals who are not able to perform their volunteer role, maintain a reasonable level of commitment, or fail to observe the rules and procedures of the program will be given the opportunity to discuss any situation that is perceived to be a violation of NCMT policies with the Program Coordinator. However, NCMT reserves the right to determine, at its discretion, that it may be in the best interest of the program to terminate a volunteer's involvement with the program.

Barn Rules/ NCMT Policies

All participants will:

- Walk when on the barn premises.
- Use appropriate voices and avoid sudden movements, particularly near the horses.
- Not chew gum or eat candy while riding or while in the riding arena.
- Wear appropriate clothes and shoes for riding and stable activities.
- Avoid loose or floppy items.
- Wear an ASTM-SEI approved helmet for all riding and stable activities.
- Refrain from smoking on the premises. **Smoking is prohibited.**
- Not approach or feed any animals unless accompanied by a NCMT volunteer who has been given explicit permission from the NCMT Therapeutic Program Instructor.
- Prior to the riding lesson, inform the riding instructor of any changes in the rider's medical condition.
- Prior to the riding lesson, inform the riding instructor of any experiences, which may affect the rider's behavior, safety, or functioning while at NCMT.
- Inform the riding instructor of any schedule changes or conflicts, which may affect the rider's attendance.

All others waiting or observing the program will:

- Closely supervise riders, siblings of riders, and/or visitors while

- waiting in the designated waiting/observation areas.
- Remain outside the riding areas at all times.
- Please ask permission from the riding instructor to take photographs or use a flash camera.
- Wait for the NCMT Therapeutic Riding Instructor to mount or dismount the riders.
- Not approach or feed any animals unless accompanied by an NCMT volunteer who has been given explicit permission from the NCMT Therapeutic Riding Program Instructor.
- Refrain from smoking on the premises. **Smoking is prohibited.**

All volunteers and staff will:

- Follow the procedures detailed in the Volunteer Handbook.
- Prior to the riding session, notify the riding instructor of any limitations or changes in their physical capabilities or pertinent medical conditions.
- Refrain from smoking on the premises. **Smoking is prohibited.**

Working With a Person Who Has Special Needs

Working with people who have special needs may be a new experience for some volunteers. Please take the time to know your participant and direct any questions discreetly to the instructors. Physical or mental impairments may be present at birth, or may be due to injury, disease, or aging. Often, a major barrier for people with special needs is not the disability itself, but the lack of awareness and knowledge by others. Above all, please treat individuals with respect, and be considerate and sensitive to their needs.

**When describing a person with special needs, remember, the person ALWAYS comes first. For example, “the boy with autism” NOT “the autistic boy.”

When You Meet A Person With A Disability

1. First of all, remember that the person with a disability is a person. She/he is like everyone else.
2. Be yourself when you meet him/her.
3. Talk about the same things you would with anyone else.
4. Help only when it's needed. Use your own judgment and don't allow yourself to constantly assist students who need to develop more independence.
5. Do nothing to a student without the instructor's permission.
6. Be patient; it is often harder to wait for an inexperienced person to do something than it is to do it yourself. As you know, when you do things yourself, you learn faster.
7. Don't be overprotective or overly solicitous. Don't shower the person with a disability with kindness or be overly sympathetic.
8. Don't offer pity or charity. The person with a disability should be treated as an equal in all things. Having a disability should not be looked on as a negative experience. A person with a disability is just another person like you.
9. Don't make up your mind about a person with a disability ahead of time. You may be surprised at his/her interests and abilities.

10. Enjoy your friendship with the person with a disability. His/her philosophy and good humor may provide you with inspiration.
11. And, most importantly, have a good time! The participants sense this and enjoy the experience even more.

Wheelchair Etiquette

Many people are unsure how to act when meeting someone in a wheelchair. Please try to keep the following in mind: always ask the wheelchair user if they would like assistance before you help; be respectful—people’s wheelchairs are an extension of their body space. Don’t hang or lean on them unless you have permission, and speak directly—be careful not to exclude the wheelchair user from conversations. If the conversation lasts more than a few minutes, sit or kneel to get yourself on the same level as the wheelchair.

Escorting an Individual with a Visual Impairment

If an individual with a visual impairment looks like they need assistance, please ask first if help is needed. Remember that they may only need verbal direction/cues. If physical assistance is needed, allow the individual to hold onto your arm above the elbow and walk one-half step ahead. The individual may also have a specific way that they prefer to have assistance. Repeat/verbalize information that may be written/posted. If you’re uncertain of what to do, ask your instructor how you can be of further assistance.

Working with Individuals with Hearing/Language Impairments

Try to maintain good eye contact, looking at the individual when speaking to him/her. Speak clearly, avoid talking slowly or over-emphasizing words and avoid long verbal instructions/conversation. Become familiar with hand gestures/body positions that the participant may be using to represent words and concepts. See your instructor with questions. Provide assistance with communication when needed (i.e., visual cues, gestures, etc). Alert the instructor if the participant is having difficulty with a hearing aid (i.e., ringing).

Glossary of Physical and Cognitive Disabilities

The following are brief, non-medical descriptions of some disabilities and conditions of participants one might encounter in a therapeutic riding setting. This is not intended as a comprehensive explanation of a specific disability.

Arthritis: Inflammatory disease of the joints. Symptoms include pain, lack of mobility, loss of strength, and permanent joint changes.

Autism & Pervasive Developmental Disorder (PDD): A neurological disorder that produces characteristics such as self-preoccupation, an inability to relate to and interact with others, and a

resistance to change or transitions. A rider with this condition may seem to be unaware of his or her surroundings but usually becomes accustomed to the routine of a lesson. Changes in routine such as mounting in a different order, riding a different horse, and/or having different side-walkers can illicit counterproductive or resistive behavior. Repetition and consistency are important in helping the rider with autism.

Cerebral Palsy: A motor disorder caused by an injury to the brain before or shortly after birth. Due to the brain's inability to control muscles, movement and coordination are affected. The muscles may be very tight (hypertonic), very loose (hypotonic), may move uncontrollably, or may be affected in a combination of these ways. CP may also involve difficulties in speech, hearing, vision, or learning. It may affect one side of the body or only involve only certain parts of the body. The amount of assistance required by a rider with this disability will vary depending on the type and severity of their condition.

Cerebral Vascular Accident (CVA): Medical term for a stroke. Stroke may have caused brain hemorrhage or brain emboli, which causes varying degrees of functional impairment, such as flaccid or spastic paralysis of arm and leg on same side of the body, or difficulty speaking, moving, or thinking.

Developmental Disabilities (DD): A diverse group of physical, cognitive, psychological, sensory, and speech impairments that begin anytime during development. Characteristics can include processing delays and delays in physical, motor, and social development.

Down Syndrome: A genetic disorder in which a person is born with an extra chromosome (chromosome 21). Characteristics include mild to severe learning disabilities, low muscle tone, and speech impairments.

Emotional Disabilities: Social, emotional, or behavioral functioning that is not age appropriate and affects a child's academics, social relationships, and self-care. The rider may be fearful or hostile and may act out verbally or physically. Try to direct the rider's attention to the task. The instructor will inform you of acceptable behavioral limits.

Hearing Impairment: Congenital or acquired hearing loss varying from mild to profound.

Intellectual Disability (ID): A disorder in which a person's overall intellectual functioning is below average with an IQ of 70 or less. The individual has an impaired ability to cope with common life demands and daily living skills. The amount of assistance required by the rider will be determined by the severity of his or her needs and by the rate at which they are able to learn.

Learning Disabilities: Neurological disorders that interfere with a person's ability to store, process, or produce information. Riders may have difficulty processing information and may need to have directions repeated, reworded, or demonstrated. The rider may need extra time to respond to instructions, or may confuse concepts such as "right" and "left."

Multiple Sclerosis (MS): Progressive neurological disease with degeneration of spinal column tracts, resulting in scar formation. Most commonly occurs in the 20 to 40 year old range. It is progressive with periods of exacerbation and remissions. Symptoms include weakness, visual impairment, fatigue, loss of coordination, and emotional sensitivity.

Muscular Dystrophy (MD): Deficiency in muscle nutrition with degeneration of skeletal muscle. Hereditary disease that mainly affects males. Characteristics include progressive muscular weakness, fatiguing easily, and sensitivity to temperature extremes.

Scoliosis: Lateral curve of the spine with a C or S shape with a rotary component. Characteristics include shoulder, trunk, and waistline asymmetry. May have back pain and postural fatigue.

Seizure Disorder: Seizures are caused by abnormal electrical discharges in the brain. They can range from a small episode of staring to sudden stiffness and jerking of limbs. They are usually controlled by medication, but may occur during the program. *There is nothing you can do to stop a seizure!* Do not try to force anything down the rider's mouth. Support the rider, stop the horse, and inform the instructor immediately. The instructor may decide to remove the rider from the horse and may require assistance.

Spina Bifida: Congenital failure of vertebral arch closure which results in spinal cord damage. Characteristics include varying degrees of paralysis of the lower limbs coupled with sensory loss. May also be associated with hydrocephalus, lordosis, scoliosis, and hip dislocations.

Spinal Cord Injury (SCI): Trauma to the spinal cord resulting in a loss of neurological function. Characteristics include paralysis of muscles below the level of injury—can be flaccid or spastic. Symptoms include fatigue, sensory loss, and pressure sores.

Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI): Accidental injury to the head resulting in impairment of cognitive, emotional, and/or physical functioning. Characteristics may include deficits in gross and fine motor skills, balance, coordination, and strength. May have deficits in language, communication, processing, memory, and perceptual skills.

Visual Impairment: Occurs in varying degrees and has a variety of causes. A rider with this disability may need help to achieve proper body alignment and to develop an awareness of the correct body position for riding. Speak to the rider in a normal tone of voice before touching them—even a gentle touch can be startling if the rider does not know you are there. The rider may require help to determine when to turn or stop the horse, as they may not be able to see the corners or if another horse has stopped in front of them.

New Canaan Mounted Troop Horses

The horse is perhaps the most important facilitator of our Super Troopers therapeutic programs. The horses at New Canaan Mounted Troop come from a variety of backgrounds. Some of their previous careers include champion show horses, dressage and trail horses, or police horses. All are donated, and each has his/her own unique personality and needs.

When selecting and training the horses used in our program, many factors are considered. Horses must meet basic criteria, including: possessing an exceptional level of tolerance, be gentle and well mannered, in good general health, and offering sound rhythmic movement as this is a key benefit of therapeutic riding.

Horses that meet the criteria are accepted on a trial basis and placed on an extensive training program to introduce them to their role in the program and the activities they will be exposed to. Mock sessions are conducted prior to having “real” riders on the horses.

New Canaan Mounted horses receive the very best of care. Each horse is on a schedule to assure good overall health including veterinarian care, hoof care, dental care, and a de-worming program.

Volunteers play a critical role in preparing horses for sessions. We encourage volunteers to gain additional knowledge of our equine friends through a variety of opportunities including lectures, clinics, and symposiums.

Working with Horses

Equine Senses

When developing relationships and working with horses, communication is key. It is critical to provide a safe environment in a therapeutic riding setting. Understanding the horse senses, instincts, and implications is a step in predicting behaviors, managing risks, and increasing positive relationships.

Hearing

The horse’s sense of hearing is very acute. The horse may also combine their sense of hearing and sight to become more familiar with new or alerting sounds. “Hearing and not seeing” is often the cause of the fright/flight response. When working with horses, note the position of the horse’s ears. Forward ears communicate attentiveness and interest. Drooping ears indicate relaxation, in-attentiveness (easily startled), exhaustion, or illness. Flattened ears indicate anger, threat or fear. Ears flicking back and forth indicate attentiveness or interest. If your horse is acting nervous, talk to him in a quiet, calm, and reassuring voice. Watch your horse’s ears for increased communication.

Sight

Horse’s eyes are geared to finding danger. They don’t have very accurate vision close up, but they can detect tiny movement at a distance. The horse’s eyes are set on either side of the head; there is a good peripheral (lateral) vision, but poorer frontal vision. The lens of the horse’s eye doesn’t change shape as humans do. Instead, a horse focuses on objects by changing their head position and raising and lowering its head. The horse’s visual memory is very accurate. Horses are thought to see quite well in the dark, due to the large size of their eyes. There is still controversy as to whether or not horses see in color. The horse may notice if something in the arena or out on a trail is different. Allow the horse an opportunity to look at new objects. Introduce new props that the horse may be unfamiliar with. The horse has better peripheral vision; consider a slightly looser rein, enabling him to move his head when taking a look at objects. Although the horse has good peripheral vision, consider two blind spots: directly in front and directly behind. The best way to approach a horse is to his shoulder. It may startle him if you approach from behind or directly in front. The horse may be unable to see around the mouth area, which is a safety consideration when hand feeding.

Touch

The horse's sense of touch is very sensitive. They can detect very light touch or pressure. Each horse has sensitive areas, and it is important to be familiar with them (i.e. flank and belly areas). Touch is used as a communication between horses and between horses and people. Horses may also use touch to examine strange objects. They will look, sniff and feel an object with their muzzle. The tongue, lips, and bars of the mouth are especially sensitive places, and we need to use caution when a horse has a bit in his mouth. Horses are trained by applying and removing pressure and may be sensitive to soft or rough touch with a person's hands or legs. Handlers should treat the horses gently but firmly. Riders may need assistance to reduce squeezing a horse with their legs. Ask the instructor/therapist what is the best handling technique.

Smell

The horse's sense of smell is thought to be very acute and it allows him to recognize other horses and people. Smell also enables the horse to evaluate situations. Allow horses the opportunity to become familiar with new objects and their environment by smelling. It is recommended that treats are not carried in your pocket since horses may desire to go after them.

Taste

Taste is closely linked with the sense of smell and helps the horse to distinguish palatable foods and other objects. A horse may lick or nibble while becoming familiar with objects and people. Be careful, as this could lead to possible biting.

Sixth Sense

Horses do have a "sixth sense" when evaluating the disposition of those around him. Horses can be hypersensitive in detecting the moods of their handlers and riders. A good therapy horse is chosen for their sensitive response to the rider. At times there may exist a personality conflict between handlers and horses. It is important to let the instructor/therapist know if you're having a difficult time relating to, or getting along with, a particular horse.

Flight is a Natural Instinct

Most horses chosen to work in a therapeutic riding setting have less of an instinct to flee. However, if frightened, horses would rather turn and run away from danger than face and fight it. At a sudden movement or noise, the horse might try to flee. Speak to the horse calmly. A frightened horse being held tightly might try to escape by pulling back. Relax your hold or untie him quickly and usually he will relax. If flight is not possible, the horse could either turn to kick out or face the problem and rear, especially in a tight area like a stall. If a horse appears to be frightened or fearful, alert program staff.

Herd Animals

Horses like to stay together in a herd or a group with one or two horses dominant, with a pecking order amongst the rest. Some horses may not like being alone. This is a consideration when horses are leaving the arena or a horse loses sight of the others while on a trail ride. Be aware that if the horse in front of a line is trotting or cantering, the horse that is following may also

attempt to trot or canter. If one horse spooks at something, the surrounding horses may also be affected. For safety, it is recommended to keep a two horse length between horses when riding within a group to respect the horse's space and pecking order.

Horse Safety Guidelines

1. Always speak to a horse when approaching it and before touching it.
2. Never approach a horse from directly behind it.
3. Never be loud or rowdy around the horses. They are likely to become frightened by loud noises or unexpected movements.
4. Do not feed the horse treats or any food from your hand. Horse treats can go into their feed buckets.
5. Never lose your temper with a horse or mistreat it. You will always get the best results with kindness.
6. While in the barn and around horses, always walk. Don't run!
7. When riding or leading, always maintain at least a two horse length between you and the horse in front of you.
8. Never wrap the lead rope around your hand.
9. Always hold the lead rope with two hands.
10. Use only the program's equipment and return it to its proper place when you are finished.
11. Never leave a horse in a stall with its reins, bridle, or lead rope still attached.
12. If you are unsure about anything, please ask. There is no such thing as a silly question!

Therapeutic Riding Program

We ask all those volunteering in the therapeutic riding program to arrive at New Canaan Mounted Troop 45 minutes prior to the session. Please make sure to retrieve a name tag in the main aisle and check in with an instructor or volunteer mentor for instructions involving grooming and tacking up horses for the upcoming session.

Grooming

1. When entering a stall, get the horse's attention by speaking gently and moving slowly. Place the halter on the head, and attach the lead line. Depending on the horse, you may tie the lead to a stall bar or lead the horse to cross ties. If you are new to grooming, you will be placed with a mentor. Retrieve a grooming box from the tack room or grooming items from the shelves by the wash stall and cross ties.
2. Begin by using the curry comb in a circular motion starting with the neck area and working down the body to the hind end to remove loose dirt and hair. It is important while grooming to check the horse for any signs of illness or injury.
3. Next use the hard brush with a flicking motion to remove hair and dirt, brushing in the same direction as the hair, always working from the neck to the back of the horse. The hard brush may also be used on the legs.
4. Use the soft brush to remove fine dust from the body, legs and face.

5. To pick hooves, begin by running your hand down the leg below the knee, gently put pressure on the leg with your fingers and ask the horse to “lift” their foot. Holding the hoof securely, pick from the heel forward to the toe, removing any caked dirt, and clean well around the frog (V shape). Please note that the frog in a horse’s hoof is very sensitive. Notify the barn staff of any foul-smelling discharge, tenderness, or hoof cracks. Once the horse is groomed, please remove hair from brushes, place grooming tools back in their box, and return it to the tack room or the shelves of the wash stall.

Tacking Up

1. Instructors will place horse’s tack in front of their stall door.
2. Saddle the horse first by placing the cotton saddle pad on the horse’s back, covering the withers. Place the supracore, riser, or wither pad on top of the cotton pad if needed. Gently place the saddle on top of the pad leaving some space under the pommel so the pad will not rub on the horse’s withers.
3. Attach the non-elastic side of the girth to the billet straps on the right side of the saddle. If horse requires a girth cover, slide it on before attaching girth to left side. Please leave the girth comfortably loose at this point. You should be able to fit your fingers between the side of the horse and the girth. A final tightening will be done by the instructor prior to riders mounting.
4. Halters fitted with colored reins are commonly used for therapeutic riding. If a bridle or grooming halter/bridle combination is to be used, it will be with the tack placed outside the stall.
5. If flies are bad, apply fly spray on legs and body around saddle area.
6. Attach handholds to rings on the front of the saddle and rainbow reins to the halter on the upper rings.
7. The horse may then be brought into the arena. Please call “heads up” followed by the name of the horse as you leave the stall and “door” before entering the arena. Bring horse into arena 15 minutes before start of riding session. Take this time to warm up your horse with an active walk. Practice halting and slowing down to make sure your horse is listening to you. Walk in both directions and take the time to let your horse look out of windows if needed and to familiarize him with any new equipment in the ring.

Please bring any problems or concerns regarding horse or tack to the attention of the instructor. Instructors and those trained by an instructor are the only ones permitted to do the final tack check and stirrup/girth adjustments. During class, handle the horse according to the instructor’s direction.

All riders mount from a mounting block in the arena with assistance from the instructor(s). The horse handler’s primary role during mounts and dismounts is to prevent the horse from moving. In an emergency, the horse leader always stays with the horse.

Un-Tacking

When a horse has finished a session and is not being used in the next lesson, please bring the horse back to his stall or cross ties to un-tack and pick the horse's feet. Brush the saddle area with a hard/soft brush. Please return all tack to its proper place. Clean leather saddles and girths with a damp sponge and saddle soap. Wipe bits clean and return all saddles, bridles, blankets/pads, and grooming tools neatly to their appropriate place.

Preparing Students to Ride

Riders come straight to the in gate at the indoor arena to locate their name tags and helmets. Volunteers will help students find and fit their assigned helmets. Approved helmets must be worn at all times in the barn for both the therapeutic riding and equine care program participants.

The Sidewalker

The sidewalker's primary role is to walk alongside the rider and provide support as indicated by the instructor. It may be direct physical support, verbal support to reinforce the instructor's directions, or acting as spotters during sessions. One or two sidewalkers may be assigned to each rider depending on the rider's needs. Upon arrival, please check in with the instructor to learn who you will be working with. Teams will wait with their assigned horse for further directions from the instructor. The Program Coordinator will assist students with their helmets, and wait with the riders until the instructor indicates it is time to mount. The instructor will come to the ingate and walk with the student to the mounting block. Riders are not permitted to enter the indoor arena or the stable area without an instructor's permission. In an emergency, sidewalkers always stay with their riders.

A variety of sidewalking techniques are used according to rider's needs. The instructor will indicate which type of support should be used. Please use caution and never force movement or use excessive pressure when applying any of these techniques.

Sidewalker Support Techniques Include:

- Sidewalk: The sidewalker walks beside the rider (lined up with the rider's shoulder), prepared for "hands on" when indicated by instructor.
- Arm over thigh: The sidewalker places the arm closest to the rider over the rider's thigh and grasps the front edge of the saddle.
- Ankle support: The sidewalker cups the rider's ankle to stabilize the rider's lower leg.
- Arm over thigh & ankle support: Occasionally, a rider needs support provided by doing both an arm over thigh, and cupping the ankle.

Additional Information for Sidewalkers:

- When a rider requires two sidewalkers, only one sidewalker should be communicating with the rider at a time as too much input can confuse a rider.
- If a rider has only one sidewalker, the leader and sidewalker usually walks on opposite sides of the horse.
- The role of the sidewalker varies greatly between riders. It is important to have an understanding of your rider's needs and knowledge of his or her goals. Please ask the instructor to provide this information to you.
- The sidewalker needs to be aware of the rider at all times.
- Never place your hand or fingers in any of the saddle's rings or buckles while sidewalking.

The job of the sidewalker is to help maintain the balance of the rider when he/she cannot maintain it himself or herself. Depending on their difficulty, there will be either one or two sidewalkers assigned to the student. The instructors will inform you as to the requirements of a particular student. For example, some students will not have to be supported all the time, but just need someone to walk beside them. Others will need to be supported and/or reminded at all times. Sidewalkers are very important, as they are constantly aware of the student and what he/she is doing. Sidewalkers should be aware of the following:

- The safety of the students depends on the sidewalker and the sidewalker must always remain alert to the needs of the rider.
- Do not just grab if a student starts to slip; do gently push him/her back into the right position or, with the instructors permission, ask the student to go into a half seat, and then sit gently back down in the saddle.
- Do not walk behind the saddle next to the horse's flank and hindquarters.
- Do not lean on the horse while you are side walking. It can make the horse tire more quickly and/or make the horse irritable.
- Riders often have various physical limitations. Therefore, the side-walker should not handle the rider (as in attempting to change the position of his or her hand, arm, leg, etc.) unless specifically asked to do so by the instructor.
- Since the sidewalker is always close to the rider, you will sometimes find that the student will want to talk to you a great deal. Do not ignore direct questions, but do try and get your rider to pay attention to the instructor in the ring. If your student is not paying attention or does not hear the instructor, you can help by reinforcing the directions.
- One of the worst distractions in the ring is excessive talking. Please keep unrelated conversations between volunteer teams for other times.
- If a problem arises, ask the leader to stop the horse and call the instructor.
- Never leave your rider's side unless you are specifically instructed to do so by the instructor.

At the Mounting Ramp/Block

The instructor may require a sidewalker at the mounting block to assist her. If so, she will call for you. If not, wait where instructed and take your position next to the rider when asked to do

so by the instructor.

At the Halt

Remain in position next to the rider and listen for directions from the instructor. Be especially alert for balance changes as the horse stops and starts.

At the Walk

Remain in position next to the rider and listen for directions from the instructor. If the rider needs special attention (such as repositioning in the saddle or having his/her foot adjusted in the stirrup), alert the instructor and the leader working with the horse. It is usually best to go to the center of the ring or the quarter line to make any necessary adjustments in order to avoid disrupting the rest of the class.

At the Trot

The rider should ask the horse to trot only when directed to do so by the instructor and only after he or she is fully prepared (holding the handhold, seat deep in the saddle, etc.). The sidewalkers and the rider will count to three and then say “trot” in unison. Generally, the horse understands what is being asked of him/her. The instructor may take the sidewalker’s place for a short time when asking the rider to trot in order to work with the student on a one-to-one basis to develop the skill. When assisting a rider at the trot, remember that the trot is a very bouncy gait and be especially alert for changes in a rider’s balance.

During Games

Remain next to the rider and be ready to reinforce the instructor’s directions as necessary. Enthusiasm is catching, so encourage the rider to play well and allow him or her to participate as independently as is safely possible.

Dismounting

The instructor is responsible for dismounting all riders. Remain next to the rider until the instructor is ready to help him or her dismount. Do not dismount the rider without the instructor.

Trail Riding

Sometimes the instructor will want students to ride a small loop outside, or “trail riding”. Sidewalkers will have to pay special attention to any potential loss of balance on the rider’s part caused by uneven footing/horse tripping. Sidewalkers will also have to be aware of sudden movements if the horse is spooked or diverts off the path to graze.

Special Situations – Falls

Occasionally, a rider will fall off a horse or have a problem that requires special attention. If such an emergency occurs, sidewalkers should remain calm, alert the horse leader to the situation, and

keep their riders from becoming overly excited while waiting for directions from the instructor. All other riders in the class will halt and side walkers will remain in position until the problem is resolved and the lesson can continue.

The Leader

A leader should be aware of the following:

- The leaders should be walking on the left side of the horse, alongside the horse's head, with his or her hand about eight inches away from the bit.
- The lead should be kept slack. Hold the extra lead line in your left hand, but never wrap it around your hand, just loop and hold tightly.
- Do not get in front or too far behind while leading. Being too far ahead can cause the horse to merely follow you and not react to the commands given by the rider.
- Being too far behind gives you less control and can trip the side walker behind you.
- The lead should never be used to pull the horse forward. A steady pull will not accomplish anything and in many cases, may even excite a horse. If for any reason, the horse needs something stronger, a few "clucks" can be very helpful.
- Care must be taken to insure the horse's head is not pushed or pulled up in the air, since that may throw the rider off balance. Also, do not let the horse's head get too low to the ground as that may pull the rider forward.
- Keep your hands away from the horse's mouth.
- Just as the size of the horse varies, so do his steps. With some horses, you will be able to walk faster than with others. Adjust your step to that of the horse so you are not pulling him forward or holding him back.

At the Mounting Ramp

If you are going to lead a student that will get on at the mounting block, the instructor will tell you how to position the horse. You will want to place the horse as close as possible to the side where the student will be mounting. Your responsibility while the student is mounting is to keep the horse as quiet as possible. Stand directly in front of the horse with your hands on the reins holding on to each side of the halter. Do not hold the halter too tightly as it will cause the horse to throw its head. After the student has mounted the horse and before the stirrups are adjusted, you may be asked to walk on and move to the center of the arena for stirrups to be adjusted, or walk on and take a few laps around the arena. Either way, listen to the instructor's direction and follow accordingly.

In the Arena

Once your rider has mounted the horse, the instructor will tell you where she wants you to position your horse in the arena. Be sure you are a safe distance from the horse in front of you at all times. As the class begins, all instructions will be given to the student by name, so be sure you know the name of your rider. Try to discourage casual conversation that impairs your ability to hear directions from the instructor and direct the attention of your rider to the instructor.

At the Walk

Many leaders forget that they have side-walkers and often get too close to the sidewalls of the arena. Allow plenty of room between the arena wall and your sidewalker! Please also keep a safe distance from the horse in front of you. If your rider cannot maintain the safe distance, then you may always help to do so. If asked to turn the horse for your rider, you will know that the rider needs assistance in making turns. Use common sense if you see your rider is getting into trouble and is not able to follow directions given by the instructor; you are certainly able to help him/her.

At the Halt

One of the most important tasks the leader must do is to step in front and face your horse to keep them from moving at the halt. This is sometimes used as a breather for the horses. Allow them the freedom to move around their heads. If they get too restless, a good way to calm them down is to rub their necks or use a soft, reassuring voice.

At the Trot

Often during a lesson, students may be asked to trot. The instructor will come over if necessary to give instructions to you and the student. Make sure the student is positioned securely in the saddle and that the side walkers have made sure the student is holding the handhold. Do not start the trot before the instructor gives the command. As the rider asks the horse to walk on, the team will count to three and then say “trot”. When the horse starts trotting, try to keep your pace at an even speed and always trot in a straight line so as not to unseat the rider. If the horse does not begin trotting immediately when you request it, do not pull on the lead. Most of the horses are very good at responding to voice commands, though you can always run into a horse that is lazy and does not want to do more than just walk. This type of horse may need a few “clucks” to get started.

During Games

Games are an important part of every lesson. The games may be simple such as “Simon Says” or “Red Light, Green Light” or more complex, such as “Musical Stalls.” The leader plays an important role in every game. The instructor will give the rules for the game to be played. Watch your student to see if he/she understands the directions. It helps if the leader is excited about the game, but not so excited that the leader plays the game for the student. Allow the rider to do as much as possible on his/her own and give him/her credit for performing well.

Trail Riding

Sometimes the instructor will want students to ride a small loop outside, or “trail riding”. Leaders will have to pay special attention to any potential loss of balance caused by uneven footing/horse tripping. Leaders will also have to be aware of sudden movements if the horse is spooked or suddenly reaches for grass.

Dismounting

The instructor will dismount the students. Once again, keep your horse quiet by standing in front while dismounting is taking place.

Special Situations – Falls

Falls are very rare, but they do happen. If your rider falls, your only concern is in the horse you are leading. The instructor (and sidewalkers, if necessary) will take care of the student. If another rider falls and the horse gets loose in the arena, then stop immediately and stand in front of your horse. NEVER let go of your horse. A loose horse in the arena can cause untold troubles. Do not panic if there is a fall. You have to remember that these children/adults may fall frequently in all types of situations—on sidewalks, off swings, etc. The fall off of the horse is really not any worse than any they could get at school. Be calm! The instructor is trained to handle any situation—that is her job! So please just keep your horse under control and allow the instructor to do her job.

Additional Rules for General Horse Safety

- Never wrap a lead line around your hand or yourself.
- Hold the lead with your right hand, and fold the excess in your left.
- Walk beside the horse when leading, not ahead or behind.
- Horses are led on the near (left) side, unless otherwise indicated by staff.
- Approach a horse from the side, avoiding quick movements, and speaking in a calm voice.
- Pat horses on the shoulder, not on the nose.
- Do not duck under horse's neck or walk behind the horse to switch sides.
- Never let reins or lead lines hang to the ground.
- Always call "door" before entering the arena with a horse.
- Maintain a safe distance (a minimum of two horse lengths) between horses.
- Shouting and/or running may startle horses. Try to use quiet voices and avoid quick movements.
- Avoid walking around the back of the horse or approaching a horse from the back end.
- When working near the hindquarters, stay close and keep one hand on the horse.

Equine Care Program

Our Equine Care Program allows participants to develop a real bond with our horses as they work with and around them during a one-hour class. Students learn the fundamentals of equine care such as brushing, picking hooves, cleaning tack, and bathing. The activities include learning about horse breeds, colors and markings, nutrition, tack and equipment, and ground work. These skills help enhance physical, cognitive, emotional, and socialization skills while interacting with equine partners and fellow students. Super Troopers experience what it means to be the caretaker of an animal, and the pride that goes along with that.

Volunteers

We ask all those volunteering in the therapeutic equine care program to arrive at New Canaan Mounted Troop 15 minutes prior to the session. Please make sure to check in and retrieve your name tag in the helmet room. Ask an instructor or volunteer mentor for information concerning which student you will be paired with. Each student is assisted by 1-2 volunteers.

Student Preparation

Students must always wear helmets during the equine care program. Students may not enter the barn without their helmets and name tags.

Curriculum

The equine care curriculum is revised from session to session as the skills of our students progress. An 8 week curriculum is offered in the fall and spring, and a 6 week curriculum is offered in the winter. Topics generally covered are: Barn Rules and Safety, Grooming Tools and Grooming Skills, Haltering, Leading, Horse Anatomy, Health, and Nutrition. Each session is comprised of a welcome and social skills circle, paddock walk, daily lesson, and a related activity to follow. Handouts are available after each lesson for our students.

NCMT Risk Management

Volunteers are responsible for knowing and following all safety rules, emergency policies and procedures as indicated, supporting all efforts to promote safe working conditions, making full use of safety equipment, reporting immediately any unsafe working conditions or behaviors, and knowing the location of first aid kits, fire extinguishers, emergency exits, and emergency plans.

Emergency Policies & Procedures

New Canaan Mounted Troop's intention is to provide a safe environment for all individuals involved with the program. Being prepared in the event of an emergency is part of providing a

safe atmosphere. Please review the following policies and procedures on how to handle specific emergencies. It is important to remember in any emergency situation to remain calm, reassure riders and students, and take direction from instructors. Instructors are responsible for managing the emergency and applying any first aid required. Volunteers may be called upon to assist.

Medical Emergencies

New Canaan Mounted Troop staff must be notified of any injury or medical emergency and are responsible for managing the emergency including evaluating the scene, determining if additional medical assistance is required, and providing any first aid required. An Occurance Report form must be completed by staff and involved individuals for every incident.

Calling for Emergency Medical Assistance

In the event of an emergency, volunteers may be asked to call for emergency medical assistance. Telephones are located in the indoor ring, the Instructor's office, and the Executive Director's office. Laminated emergency information cards are posted in the Learning Center, the bulletin board in the barn, and next to the telephone on the shelf in the indoor ring. There will also be a cell phone located in the indoor arena and in the barn next to the bulletin board during all sessions.

Location of First Aid Kits

A primary human first-aid kit is located in the Learning Center, Indoor Ring and the Instructor's office. A defibrillator is located in the white case on the wall in the Instructor's office. All horse first aid supplies are located in the feed room in the wall cabinets.

Fire

The facility is equipped with a sprinkler system, fire pull-boxes, and fire extinguishers located throughout the buildings. Fire extinguishers are located in the feed room, Learning Center, and the Executive Director's office. If you see a fire and the alarm has not sounded, pull a fire pull-box and call 911 requesting that emergency vehicles turn off sirens as they approach. All individuals should evacuate the facility and go to the elevated field across the driveway from the barn. All exits are marked. Designated staff will assist with evacuation. If it is safe to enter the barn, a staff person will designate crew to assist with evacuating the horses to the turnout paddocks.

Handling Bodily Fluids

It is good policy to treat all bodily fluids as infectious. To protect volunteers and participants we recommend: washing hands before and after class and use a protective barrier should you come in contact with bodily fluids, e.g. runny nose, saliva, blood, etc.

Contact Information

New Canaan Mounted Troop

22 Carter Street
New Canaan, CT 06840

Sara Tucker
Executive Director
203-966-0634
sara.tucker@newcanaanmountedtroop.org

Caroleigh Evarts
Therapeutic Program Coordinator
203-966-0634
supertroopers@newcanaanmountedtroop.org