



Volunteer Tips and Tricks

Spring 2024



Topics Covered

- Instructor Training and Tasks
- Hope Haven Programs
- Hope Haven Competition Streams
- Lesson Break Down
- Things to Consider Before Assisting
- Tips for Working with Disabilities
- Equine Communication

Instructor Training and Tasks

- Equestrian Canada Certified Instructor of Beginners or Competition Coaches
- PATH International Certified Therapeutic Riding Instructors and/or CanTRA Certified Therapeutic Riding Instructor
- Continued education in Para-Dressage and working with (dis)abilities
- Tasks during a lesson
 - Participant Management
 - Volunteer Management
 - Horse Management and Welfare
 - Lesson Planning and Execution
 - Participant Goal Planning, Progression and Achievement

Hope Haven Programs

- Adaptive Riding
 - Teaching the skill and sport of horseback riding in a way easy to understand for the athlete
 - Athletes must be willing/able to mount and ride safely and be under 220 lbs weight limit
- Adaptive Horsemanship
 - Teaching the skill of working with horses on the ground in an easy to understand way
- Hippotherapy
 - Physiotherapy conducted on horseback using the horses movements to assist the client goals
 - Only ridden therapy program at Hope Haven - conducted by licensed Physiotherapist
- Equine Assisted Learning
 - Working with the horses in a guided setting to learn about yourself and achieve personal goals

Hope Haven Competition Streams

- Dressage Competition Team
 - Offered to riders that have shown dedication, interest and progression in their riding
 - Monthly virtual competitions April - October and off property competitions July - September
 - Team made up of Para-Dressage riders (physical disabilities) and open division riders
- Special Olympics Team Pegasus
 - Athletes with an intellectual disability
 - 3 team events held spring, summer and fall + 2 invitational competitions
 - Currently only registered equestrian team in Ontario but is an International sport
- Hope Haven Spring & Fall Invitational Competitions
 - In house virtual competitions open to centres across Canada

Lesson Break Down

- Lessons are scheduled for 1 hour & 15 minutes - participant pays for 1 hour (cross ties and arena)
- Example - **Tuesdays 2:00 - 3:15**
 - 1:30 - Volunteer arrives to prepare for lesson and bring in horse
 - 2:00 - Participant arrives
 - 2:00 - 2:15 - Grooming and tack up time in the cross ties (& Horsemasters)
 - 2:15 - 3:00 - Arena time (riding or groundwork)
 - 3:00 - Rider dismounts and heads home
 - 3:00 - 3:15 - Untacking, turning out horses - prepare for next lesson if required

Participant Classification

- **A - Independent**
 - Often don't have a volunteer - may be a barn assist position to assist Instructor
- **B - Assistance**
 - Participant needs some assistance with grooming/tacking and is often on lead during lesson
- **C - Considerable Assistance**
 - Participant needs lots of assistance with grooming/tacking up and will be on lead whole lesson
- **D - Direct Mount**
 - Participant arrives for scheduled lesson time and gets directly on horse
 - Volunteer does all grooming, tacking and leading during lesson
 - Often Hippotherapy or high needs riders

Horse Weight and Rider Weight

- Hope Haven has a rider weight limit of 220 lbs but each horse has their own personal limit
- Horses max rider weight calculated by horses weight + tack weight + age/health considerations
 - Horses are assigned an unbalanced rider and a balanced rider weight (20 lb difference)
- Rider weight calculated by physical weight + disability/balance considerations
- We strictly enforce the rider weight limit rule to ensure the best possible welfare for our horses and to hopefully limit mechanical breakdowns and enjoyment in their careers
- Heaviest horses - Ziggy and Thunder - Unbalanced 200 lbs, balanced 220 lbs
- Most of herd has balanced weight of 180 and unbalanced weight of 160
- Fred, Arwen, Viento and Ruby are unmounted horsemanship horses ONLY

Grooming, Tacking Up & Horsemasters

- Considered part of the participant's paid lesson
- Added a couple years ago to improve horsemanship and partnership with their horse
- Scheduled 15 minutes from arrival time (i.e. 2:00 - 2:15)
- Great time to socialize and chat with your participant
 - Instructor will often step back and let you be in control
- Grooming - focus on routine, coordination, equine behaviour and partnership
- Tacking Up - focus on routine, coordination and equine education
- Perfect time to incorporate Horsemasters education
 - "Let's brush the withers", "Show me where is his hock", "Can you help me with his throat latch"

Horsemasters Continued

- Part of the Special Olympics program but incorporated into all lessons
- 5 levels - Beginner, Intermediate, Advanced, Pro and Master
- Each level includes 3 learning components of varying difficulty
 - Equine body parts
 - Tack parts
 - Horse Handling
- Participants are judged and scored on their ability to remember and demonstrate the information without assistance
- Ties in very nicely with the 15 minutes in the cross ties and the warm up in the arena as practice time

Arena Time

- Scheduled 45 minutes in arena (warming up, mounted OR groundwork)
- Instructor is in charge of providing clear, easy to understand directions and maintaining schedule
 - Should be only person communicating with rider unless directly specified by instructor
- Leaders role - control/comfort of the horse at all times
 - Leader should maintain forward facing position while leading horse (not looking at/talking with rider) so that they can safely lead and watch the horse's facial cues for any communications
- Sidewalkers role - supporting the rider and participating in lesson as required
 - Instructor may ask sidewalker to talk with or assist participant physically during the lesson
 - Can also support rider by communicating needs/issues with instructor

Things to Consider Before Assisting

- Can they do it themselves?
- Have they had time to process and respond to instructions?
- Is it really necessary?
- Is the participant becoming prompt dependent?
- Did the Instructor ask you to reinforce directions?
- Is the Instructor still talking with the participant?
- Allow them to make mistakes and problem solve
- Talk to the participant and the horse directly and like your equal
- Be careful how you word questions or comments

Things to Consider Before Assisting

- Participants are people first - focus on their abilities not their disabilities
- Always ask before touching a participant, wheelchair or support animal to assist with something
- “Hugs are for Home, Handshakes and High Fives are for Hope”
- Listen carefully and patiently to someone who has difficulty speaking
- Place yourself at eye level with someone in a wheelchair or on crutches
- Relax and be yourself
- The use of the participant’s given name is used during lessons. We avoid the use of nicknames or terms of endearment unless otherwise directed

Tips for Working with Disabilities

- **Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)**
 - May have difficulty maintaining focus and processing auditory input (over stimulation)
 - May be constantly moving and make impulsive decisions without considering consequences
- **Instructor Considerations**
 - Symptoms with relation to safety, volunteer needs, horse choice (high impact for hyperactivity)
- **Tips for Volunteers**
 - Maintain “one voice” in the lesson (Instructor) so it is clear to the participant where to focus
 - Ask your Instructor how/if they would like you to redirect attention if participant gets distracted
 - Be aware horse may feed off of riders energy and may need more reminders to stay focused
 - Encourage/take lots of deep breaths and try to maintain a calm, welcoming atmosphere

Tips for Working with Disabilities

- **Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)**
 - Difficulty with language, social interaction, change and managing emotions
 - Restricted interests, repetitive actions (stimulation or echolalia), sensory processing difficulties and behavioural problems are common
- **Instructor Considerations**
 - Communication style (non verbal vs verbal), sensory processing (helmets/tack), common behaviours, horse needs and volunteer needs
- **Tips for Volunteers**
 - Consistency in schedule as much as possible to decrease changes for the participant
 - “One voice” to decrease sensory input for the participant
 - Give simple choices and allow lots of processing time
 - Work with Instructor on the plan for unwanted behaviours and redirection

Tips for Working with Disabilities

- **Down Syndrome**
 - Most commonly diagnosed chromosomal disorder (Trisomy 21)
 - May demonstrate behavioural problems, spinal instabilities, heart defects, intellectual disability, low muscle tone, obesity, sensory processing or speech/language disorders
- **Instructor Considerations**
 - Is the participant medically cleared for riding? Do I have the results of the Atlanto-Axial X-Ray?
 - Communication needs, establishing routines, teaching strategies (multi-sensory), give choices
- **Tips for Volunteers**
 - Allow longer processing time and break tasks down into smaller steps
 - Offer choices and be aware they may have sensory processing issues (Fjord hair!!)

Tips for Working with Disabilities

- **Intellectual Disability**
 - Decreased problem solving, memory, reasoning, and awareness of danger
 - Difficulty with self care, speech/language, behaviour problems and strength/muscle tone
- **Instructor Considerations**
 - Communication needs, establishing routines, teaching strategies (multi-sensory)
 - Increased supervision for decreased danger awareness and breaking tasks down
- **Tips for Volunteers**
 - Establish a consistent routine in the cross ties using simple steps and sentences
 - Allow increased processing time for questions or cues
 - Stick with the “one voice” technique to decrease sensory input

Tips for Working with Disabilities

- **Sensory Processing Disorder**
 - Difficulty registering, interpreting and responding appropriately to sensory information
 - Difficulty managing emotions, unexpected responses to stimuli and self stimulation possible
- **Instructor Considerations**
 - Ability to wear a helmet and severe sensitivities to tactiles (reins/saddle), scents and movement
 - Common reactions when overstimulated - safety for all involved during lesson
- **Tips for Volunteers**
 - Always ask before touching/assisting participant
 - Don't force them to do something - calmly encourage them to try
 - Work with the Instructor on a plan that allows extra processing time and breaks
 - Use the "one voice" plan - allow the Instructor to lead the lesson, provide quiet support

Tips for Working with Disabilities

- **Physical Disability (Wheelchair User, Cerebral Palsy, etc)**
 - May have unusually high or low muscle tone, spasticity, limited or no functional use of limb
 - Can affect core stability, balanced use of aids and ability to mount, dismount, brush and lead
- **Instructor Considerations**
 - Physical limitations, horse height/weight requirements, physical support requirements, etc.
- **Tips for Volunteers**
 - Often hands on sidewalking - don't be afraid to ask to switch sides when you need to
 - Core stability could be affected - slow, even and balanced turns and transitions while leading
 - Always ask before touching a wheelchair, mobility device or speaking with service animal
 - Let participant know you are available to assist if they need it - don't assume they do

Tips for Working with Disabilities

- **Invisible Disabilities**
 - Symptoms include debilitating pain, fatigue, dizziness, cognitive dysfunction, brain injuries, mental health disorders, hearing or vision impairment, depression, learning difficulties
 - Not always obvious but can limit the participants interactions
- **Instructor Considerations**
 - Participants symptoms, how they are feeling that day, engagement/interest
- **Tips for Volunteers**
 - Needs may change based on participants health each ride
 - Be ready to work with your instructor and change a plan on the fly
 - Allow for increased processing time/decompression time as needed

Equine Communication

- <https://youtu.be/Pza9GZXuEYY>
- Watch this short 3 minute video
- Try to identify what the horses are communicating throughout

Equine Communication Continued

- Horses use their facial expressions, voice, tail and feet to communicate
- As a leader we are focused primarily on the facial expressions
 - Ears, eyes and head carriage can tell you a lot about what the horse is feeling
 - Ideally ears are swivelling from front to back, eyes are relaxed and head is moving with their body (don't want anything locked in place)
- The Instructor is always watching the horse for cues that something is wrong
 - If they are concerned about something the Instructor will address it in a way as to not make the participant nervous or concerned
- If this is a new horse to you take some time before the participant arrives to discuss the horse with the Instructor and get to know any of their quirks or tricks
 - I.e. Flyboy can be dancy in the cross ties, Taylor likes to carry her head lower during the lesson