

# Volunteer Information Packet

Special Equestrians of the Treasure Coast, Inc. (SETC) was founded in 1992 as a 501(c)3 non-profit organization, providing educational and adaptive horseback riding for people with physical, emotional and mental disabilities in Indian River, St. Lucie and Brevard Counties. SETC is a Center Member of the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship, International (PATH, Intl).



PATH Intl. was originally founded in 1969 as the North American Riding for the Handicapped Association (NARHA) to promote safe and effective therapeutic horseback riding throughout the United States and Canada. Today, PATH Intl. has over 850 member centers and nearly 8,000 individual members in countries all over the world, who help and support almost 69,000 men, women and children with special needs each year through a variety of equine-assisted service programs.

Research has shown that horseback riding improves balance, muscle control, attention span, fine and gross motor skills, posture and coordination. Program participation also develops self-awareness, responsibility, social skills and builds confidence. See more at [www.PATHIntl.org](http://www.PATHIntl.org) and [www.SpecialEquestriansTreasureCoast.org](http://www.SpecialEquestriansTreasureCoast.org).

## Welcome!

Thank you for your interest in volunteering at Special Equestrians! Our participants are so grateful to you, as we can only run such a program with the help of volunteers.

SETC operates on the principle of teamwork with staff members and volunteers helping to make SETC the best it can be. We hope you will find your work pleasant, and rewarding as well as challenging. If you have unanswered questions after reading this handbook, please feel free to discuss them with an instructor or the Executive Director.

### *Mission Statement:*

Special Equestrians of the Treasure Coast, Inc. fosters personal achievement through equine assisted activities for individuals with special needs in a safe and stimulating environment.

## **Programs**

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SETC offers Adaptive Riding and other Equine Assisted Learning programs including ground horsemanship and stable management. Each participant is screened by a doctor prior to entry into the program to determine that riding will not be detrimental to the person's condition. Individual plans are established for each participant, detailing short-term and long-term goals. Goals are monitored and updated as participants progress to become as independent as possible.

- **Riding time:** If there are two or fewer riders, the riding session will be 30 minutes. If there are three participants, the session will be up to 45 minutes. This allows time for mounting and dismounting. It is up to the instructors' discretion to decrease the length of a session for any reason including the following: Participant fatigue, participant medical problems, participant complaining of discomfort, participant being unbalanced, participant behavior problems, horse fatigue, other horse related problems or weather. If a horse problem occurs, we will attempt to complete the lesson, if possible, on another horse. Instructors will evaluate each individual participant's needs and continue the session if plausible.
- If there are not enough volunteers or horses available to conduct a safe riding lesson, a ground/horsemanship lesson may be offered in place of the riding session. All mounted riding sessions and ground horsemanship sessions are conducted or directly supervised by a currently certified PATH Intl. Certified Therapeutic Riding Instructor.
  - ▶ ***Adaptive Riding Program:*** Participants are scheduled to ride once a week for 30 minutes. The minimum age for this program is four years old. These are typically group sessions with one instructor teaching two to three participants. Participants are screened by an instructor and programs are periodically reviewed for changes.
  - ▶ ***Horsemanship:*** Participants will participate one time per week for 30 minutes working with horses from the ground. Participants will learn to groom and lead horses in addition to other horse care activities. These are typically group sessions led by a PATH Intl. certified instructor, and participants work one-on-one with volunteers.
  - ▶ ***Ride Beyond Diagnosis:*** In coordination with local cancer support group, Friends After Diagnosis, SETC provides the healing power of horses to cancer survivors. This program is conducted by PATH Intl. certified instructors and offers a unique experience for all involved.
  - ▶ ***Special Olympics:*** SETC hosts Indian River County's annual Special Olympics Equestrian Games at the beginning of each year. Participants must qualify based on the standards set by Special Olympics Florida.

# Volunteer Guidelines

## **Volunteer Commitment**

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Volunteers are a crucial piece in serving our participants and horses who depend on you to make their lessons possible. Volunteer attendance is vital to the success and safety of our programs.

- It is preferred that volunteers are available on a regular lesson day each week for the duration of a 10-week session. Our participants and horses benefit from the consistency of having a regular team.
- Staff and volunteers are expected to arrive 30 minutes prior to the start of the lessons for which they are scheduled. If a volunteer is going to be more than 10 minutes late for their scheduled shift, they should call an instructor and advise of their expected arrival time.
- If an instructor or volunteer falls ill or has an emergency that makes them unavailable for the shift, a staff member should be informed as soon as possible so a substitute may be found to fill the position.
- If a volunteer or employee has a planned vacation or medical leave, he/she should provide the dates of leave as soon as reasonably possible in order to allow sufficient time to plan work schedules. Excessive absenteeism and/or frequent lateness are sufficient causes for disciplinary action.
- Volunteer assignments are based on interest, experience and availability. SETC regularly conducts volunteer trainings based on qualifications to provide opportunities for anyone wanting to further their involvement within the organization.

## **Volunteer Requirements**

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1. Due to insurance regulations and our PATH Intl. center standards, all volunteers must be at least 14 years old with a guardian present, or at least 16 years old without a guardian present.
2. Volunteers are required to attend an orientation and several training sessions. This will include safety and emergency policies and procedures, general rules and hands-on training in all aspects of the operation.
3. Volunteers are expected to demonstrate a positive attitude, commitment, punctuality, reliability and be able to work independently with minimal staff supervision.
4. Volunteering may involve moderate physical activity and working outside in varying weather conditions. Please be sure you are comfortable with the conditions of the role you select.
5. Volunteers must be able to adapt to change and must possess the ability to follow directions and take instruction.
6. Because of the nature of the service provided, SETC reserves the right to make the final determination as to the appropriateness of volunteers for our organization.

## **Volunteer Disciplinary & Dismissal**

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No volunteer will be dismissed without an opportunity to discuss the reasons with supervisory staff. The volunteer may at any time, for whatever reason, decide to sever the volunteer relationship with SETC. Notice of such a decision should be communicated as soon as possible.

It is the discretion of SETC's staff to accept or remove a volunteer or visitor from the program. People who do not adhere to the rules and procedures are subject to dismissal. Possible grounds for dismissal may include, but are not limited to:

- Conduct endangering participants, volunteers or the horses
- Consistent failure to follow safety procedures with respect to the horses and facility
- Frequently arriving late or not showing up for scheduled volunteer times

Volunteers at SETC shall have no history of inappropriate behavior with fire or any tendencies or history of abuse or violence directed toward other people or animals. SETC reserves the right to deny services to any individual based upon concerns for the participant's safety and/or the safety of the horses, volunteers, staff, facility, or for other reasons in accordance with PATH, Intl. operating center guidelines.

## **Confidentiality**

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You are required to keep confidential any SETC information to which you have access. Examples of confidential information include participant personal or disability history, donor information, evaluations, etc. Staff members and volunteers are to limit dissemination or exposure of confidential information to unauthorized individuals by policing work stations and refraining from discussing confidential matters in an open forum. All confidential information is stored in a password-protected online database and locked filing cabinets. Deliberate attempts to reveal confidential data or repeated accidental disclosures, will result in termination.

SETC written materials, including any and all manuals, policies, procedures, promotions, etc., cannot be reproduced or distributed without the express consent of the Executive Director.

# Volunteer Tasks

## Lesson Procedures

1. Upon arrival to the barn, check in with the day's Barn Leader or an Instructor.
  2. Horse Groomers should begin the day by picking out all horses' feet and marking them off on the board.
  3. Horse Leaders should then stretch their assigned horses and walk them a couple of laps in the arena to check for any lameness issues. Address any concerns with an instructor as soon as possible.
  4. Groomers can then fully groom horses and prepare them to be saddled by Tackers.
  5. Once horses are saddled and ready for their first lesson, Leaders can take them out to the arena to warm up.
  6. 2-3 minutes prior to the start of each lesson, all volunteers will gather for a team meeting at the wash racks.
  7. In between lessons, all tack will be sanitized and organized to be easily accessible the next time it is needed.
  8. Record working time in the Volunteer Hours book at the end of each day to later be transferred to our secure online database. Recording attendance is necessary for writing recommendations for schools, applying for grants, board reports, and most importantly to be accountable for all individuals on the property in the event of an emergency.
- During lessons, the instructor is ultimately responsible for each rider, horse and volunteer. All directions should come from the instructor, including the assignment of participants, horses and volunteers. The instructors determine the tack, method of mounting, and the structure of the lesson plans. Please refrain from talking during lessons unless directed.

## Volunteer Job Requirements

Advancement will be determined by Special Equestrians Instructors after each training. Volunteer name tags are labeled based on level of training with the denoted symbols.

Sidewalker- Provides support to mounted students

- Attended orientation
- Able-bodied to trot length of arena and assist in mounting/dismounting
- Focused on the rider's safety and success



Arena Assistant- Helps set up arena before lessons and assists instructors during lessons

- Attended orientation
- Able to assist instructor with moving obstacles



Groomer- Grooms horses and picks feet prior to start of the day's lessons

- Approved Sidewalker
- Able to demonstrate how to safely work around a horse
- Able to safely brush horse and pick out feet as instructed
- Able to stretch horses prior to lessons



Tacker- Saddles and unsaddles horses before and after lessons, sanitizes and organizes tack

- Passed Groomer Training
- Able to demonstrate knowledge of English and Western tack and placement on horses
- Can lift up to 15 pounds over head



Level 1 Leader- Leads Level 1 Horses within barn and during lessons in arena

- Passed Groomer training
- Able to correctly halter and tie horse
- Able to recognize obvious issue with tack
- Able to demonstrate beginner horse sense:
  - Attentive to cues from horse
  - Able to gently, yet confidently, handle horse
- ★ May lead during lessons- to and from barn and in arenas only
- ★ May lead horses to be mounted at blocks only



Level 2 Leader- Leads any horse within barn and during lessons in arena or pasture

- Passed Groomer, Tacker, and Level 1 Leader trainings
- Able to demonstrate advanced horse sense:
  - Attentive to cues from horse
  - Able to gently, yet confidently, handle horse
  - Able to identify inappropriate behavior from horse and gently correct
- ★ May lead during lessons anywhere on the property
- ★ May lead horses to be mounted at blocks and at ramp



Schooling Team- Exercises horses from ground or horseback with direction from instructors

- Passed Groomer, Tacker, Level 1 and Level 2 Leader trainings
- Able to take a horse's vital signs
- Able to identify obvious health concerns, illnesses and unsoundness of horses
- Able to keep a balanced, centered seat at a walk, trot and canter
- Able to demonstrate posting trot with correct diagonal and diagonal changes
- Able to demonstrate quiet hands and legs at any gait
- Able to mount and dismount without assistance



Barn Leader- Manages all activities related to horses and volunteers in barn during lessons

- Passed Groomer, Tacker, Level 1 and Level 2 Leader trainings
- Able to manage horses and other volunteers
- Able to assist volunteers, students, and parents wherever necessary
- Able to manage the preparation of multiple horses for lessons
- Willing to step in to cover any position necessary



## Safety Rules and Regulations

SETC works to maintain a safe and healthy environment for all volunteers, employees and participants. SETC takes all practical steps to maintain a program that provides everyone with safe working conditions. In turn, you are expected to follow safe working habits. It is the duty of the organization to ensure that:

1. All personnel of SETC is advised on health and safety rules at the barn.
2. Appropriate safety training and personal protective equipment is provided where necessary.
3. Any identified hazards on the property are promptly corrected by:
  - A. Identifying and amending unsafe equipment.
  - B. Stopping unsafe practices and providing retraining on procedures.
4. All employees and key volunteers will be trained on fire prevention techniques and fire extinguisher use.
5. Individuals are prohibited from handling chemicals unless properly trained.
6. Equipment or tools to be used on site will only be handled by properly trained individuals.
7. Volunteers and employees will not handle horses unless trained or do so under the guidance of an instructor.

### The following items are your responsibility:

- Comply with all safety rules and regulations.
- Read and understand any safety manuals or other applicable policies and procedures.
- Advise an instructor or the Executive Director of unsafe working conditions or practices.
- Suggest additions or changes to safety rules and regulations.
- Assist and encourage fellow staff members and volunteers to work safely.
- Report all injuries and complete an occurrence report as soon as it is practical.

The following rules are just a few examples for safety conduct and are listed only to give you an idea of the general standards of safety and good judgment expected by SETC.

### Dress Code

SETC has established a dress code that reflects a well-organized and professionally operated organization. The below defines appropriate equestrian attire for SETC staff and volunteers.

- SETC logoed shirts or other appropriate t-shirts or wide-shouldered, high-cut tank tops may be worn. Jeans or long pants are suggested, but shorts longer than 6" inseam are also acceptable. It is also recommended that volunteers wear boots, but tennis shoes or other enclosed shoes are acceptable.
- No open-toed or open-heeled shoes or sandals of any kind may be worn
- No dangling jewelry is allowed.
- No short-shorts (min. 6" in-seam) or clothing with holes, fringe, sequins or stains.
- No low-cut or spaghetti strap tops, shirts with offensive words/logos/pictures.
- Hats and visors must be clean, in good condition and not contain foul or suggestive language.
- Perfume and cologne should be worn/used in moderation, keeping in mind potential interaction with horses and/or people allergic to certain chemicals.

Individuals arriving to SETC with inappropriate clothing will be reminded of the dress code and asked to comply prior to returning to the site. A second offense will result in a verbal warning with the individual being sent home to change clothes. Further violations will result in disciplinary action, including suspension and/or termination. The Executive Director has final authority in approving/disapproving proper attire for all SETC personnel.

Booths/Events: Anyone representing SETC at a booth or during an event is required to wear a SETC shirt and/or name tag and other attire as appropriate for the event.

### Personal Safety Rules

1. Cell phones must be on vibrate or silent while on the property. Volunteers may not use cell phones at any time during a lesson or during mounting and dismounting of the rider. If you are not actively part of a lesson and absolutely have to take a call, please step away from the barn, participants, volunteers and horses.
2. Smoking is prohibited at all times on SETC property. No alcohol or drugs allowed on premises.
3. Leading, sidewalking and assisting in the stable can be physically demanding, and we advise you to pace yourself and take frequent rest and water breaks throughout the day.
4. No lessons will be given if there is thunder or lightning in the area.
5. Update your information annually with changes to personal contact, health and emergency contact information.
6. Monitor texts, emails and Facebook notifications about events and scheduling.
7. Notify an instructor, Executive Director, or board member about any concerns.

## **Barn Safety Rules**

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1. An instructor, barn leader, or at least two assigned volunteers with granted permission must be present before horses are removed from stalls or pasture.
2. Keep doors/walkways clear of all obstacles.
3. Place temporary obstructions away from doors and walkways or posted warnings.
4. Keep cabinet doors and drawers closed when not in use.
5. Use refuse containers for waste and recycling containers for recycling.
6. Report any accidents or occurrences to the Executive Director or an instructor as soon as possible.
7. Know where the first aid supplies and manuals are located.
  - Human first aid kit is located just inside tack room to left side of door
  - Horse first aid kit is located in cabinet next to horse grooming board
  - Emergency information is posted with both first aid kits and in main aisle by tack room door
8. Know where the fire extinguishers are and how to use them.
9. If you must lift something as part of your job, lift with your legs, not with your back.
10. Stall door latches must be turned in and doors completely opened before letting horses through.
11. Stall doors must be completely closed and latches closed with clips locked when horses are enclosed.

## **Equine Safety Rules**

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1. All injuries and inappropriate or dangerous horse behavior must be reported to an instructor.
2. Use caution when working around the horses, and remember:
  - Approach a horse from the side, never directly from the front or back in a horse's blind spot.
  - Always lead a horse with a lead rope. Never wrap a lead line around your hand or other body part.
  - Try to walk around the front of the horse rather than the rear. If you must go behind the horse, put your hand on the rear, walking close to the rump to let the horse know you are there.
  - If a horse appears nervous in the stall, do not allow yourself the possibility of being trapped. Do not enter the stall, alert an instructor.
  - Pat horses on the shoulder, not on the nose. Respect their space and they will respect yours.
  - Do not enter a paddock or pasture if a horse is running, bucking, or appears to be nervous. Do not try to break up horse fights. Contact an instructor about all dangerous behavior immediately.
  - *Cross tie rules:* Do not duck under the horse's neck. Go under the cross ties and around the front of the horse. Take the lead rope off when the horse is on cross ties. If the lead rope dropped onto the floor, the horse could step or trip on it. Hold horses in hand for stretching, clipping and administering medications.
3. Never hand feed the horses. Treats and food must be placed in their feed buckets.
4. Unless instructed, do not hand graze the horses. It allows them to think it's okay to graze during lessons.
5. Do not let horses rub or push on you. They could knock you or a student to the ground.
6. Do not allow horses loose on the grounds when participants are on property.
7. Do not walk horses down road across cattle grate.

## **Lessons Safety Rules**

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1. All riders must wear ASTM-SEI approved helmets and use safety stirrups when riding.
2. Only instructors make selections of the horse and equipment used for each individual participant.
3. Only instructors or trained personnel may bridle and unbridle horses.
4. Instructors conduct safety checks of each horse's tack and rider's helmet and attire before the participants mount. Instructors check the girth and tack several times throughout lessons.
5. The arena gates must be closed before a lesson begins.
6. In an emergency involving riders, all participants are to stop their horses and remain still. The side walkers and instructor help the participant in need. The horse leader takes care of the horse.
7. If a horse is loose in the ring, leaders halt and hold their horses. The instructor will get the loose horse.
8. Participants are not allowed in the barn or pasture without a designated volunteer or instructor present.
9. Horse leaders focus on the horse and should not be talking to the rider.
10. Sidewalkers focus on the participant. If one person needs to change sides or positions, everyone must halt and transition one at a time so the rider is never left unsupported.
11. Never discipline a horse with a participant riding.

## **Office Safety Procedures**

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1. Keep work areas as neat and organized as possible.
2. Always put large books or files on the bottom shelves of bookcases, not on top.
3. Do not overload power outlets.
4. Do not leave power cords, briefcases, files, etc. in walkways.
5. Do not open more than one file drawer at a time; this can cause the file cabinet to tip over.
6. Keep cabinet doors, desk drawers and file drawers closed when not in use.
7. Do not leave liquids near computers or printer.
8. Clean up spills on floor to prevent slipping.
9. Learn to recognize stress in the workplace and take steps to alleviate the situation. This may include taking a break to stretch, relaxing muscles or taking a few deep breaths before continuing to work.

## **Facility and Equipment Rules**

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1. Do not attempt repairs on equipment. Report any electrical problems immediately.
2. Only trained individuals may operate equipment and must follow proper safety precautions. Report malfunctioning equipment to the Executive Director.
3. When walking or driving in pasture, be aware of hazards including the pond and drainage ditches which are marked by orange cones.

## **Hurricane Action Plan**

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Once a tropical storm has been evaluated and named by NOAA, office staff will monitor the storm track based on Hurricane Center and County Emergency Management updates. If a storm is projected to reach land in the Treasure Coast area, the SETC Disaster Preparedness and Recovery Plan will be implemented. (The full plan can be found in the office)

## **Other Weather Action Plan**

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Weather is always monitored by staff and instructors to determine whether lessons will be safe. Any posted advisories for the area, such as heat or wind, will be cause for cancelation and participants will be contacted.

If any lightning is seen or thunder is heard, all riders must be dismounted and participants should leave the property when safe. Light rain is generally not a reason for cancelation by SETC, but an official call will be made by instructors at the time. If arena conditions are not suitable for safe activities, such as flooding, an optional ground horsemanship lesson will be offered or lessons will be cancelled.

## **Fire/Disaster Action Plan**

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Meeting place: Everyone will meet by the front gate to the property, leaving the gate clear for EMS to enter.

1. Determine the location of the fire/situation and call 911.
2. Evacuate people and animals to designated areas.
  - A. Plan evacuation by priority- people that do not need assistance should leave the area calmly.
  - B. If the structure is relatively safe and it is believed that people can assist in removing others and horses from the barn or office, instruct what action to take.
  - C. Send horses on the safest route to the arena or pasture, depending on where the fire is located.
  - D. Once outside, do not let people reenter to assist the removal of others.
  - E. If safe, take the first aid kit when exiting the building.
3. Check to make sure all occupants of the building are accounted for by the property gate. Ranking uninjured SETC staff member or volunteer is responsible for accounting for all personnel and visitors, as well as delegating duties related to care of the injured and supervision of the uninjured.
4. Assist the injured.
  - A. Address any life-threatening injuries first.
  - B. Tag any injured individuals with name and type of injury.
  - C. Have the uninjured assist in treating the injured and keeping everyone calm.
  - D. Do not perform any medical assistance without prior training. All instructors are CPR/First Aid certified.
5. SETC volunteers and employees should be familiar with evacuation procedures and familiarize visitors and participants as needed.
6. Emergency contact information for staff, volunteers and participants is maintained in a secure online database. Copies of all emergency contact information are stored in the office.