

## WHO WE ARE

### RIVER VALLEY RIDERS

#### **Mission of River Valley Riders (RVR):**

**To enrich the lives of children and adults with special needs by providing equine assisted activities and therapies.**

Key facts about RVR:

- Lessons are conducted by Certified Instructors in accordance with the safety, training and instructional guidelines of the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship, International (PATH Intl).
- Nominal fees are charged for lessons and scholarships are available.
- Lessons are open to students in the greater Minneapolis/St. Paul metro area and western Wisconsin.
- Registered as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and donations are tax deductible.
- The continuation of the program relies on the support from the community and our team of over 200 volunteers.

Learn more at: [rivervalleyriders.org](http://rivervalleyriders.org)

**RVR Hotline 651-439-2558**

### PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION OF THERAPEUTIC HORSEMANSHIP INTERNATIONAL

River Valley Riders is a member of the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International (PATH Intl.). PATH Intl. is a non-profit international organization whose mission, since its inception in 1969, has been to promote and support equine facilitated activities for individuals with disabilities. Headquartered in Denver, CO with membership all over the globe, PATH Intl. is a professional membership association for individuals in the field of equine assisted activities and therapies--who inspire and enrich the human spirit for individuals with special needs.

PATH Intl. changes and enriches lives by promoting excellence in equine assisted activities through certification of instructors and accreditation of member centers. The association is a global authority, resource and advocate for appreciating the power of the horse to change lives. Through a wide variety of educational resources, the association helps individuals start and maintain successful equine assisted activities and therapies programs for individuals with special needs. With nearly 4,800 certified instructors and equine specialists and 873 member centers around the globe, nearly 8,000 PATH Intl. members help almost 69,000 children and adults--including more than 6,700 veterans and active-duty military personnel.

Learn more at: [pathintl.org](http://pathintl.org)

## WHERE WE ARE

**Mailing Address:**

8362 Tamarack Village  
Suite 119-440  
Woodbury, MN 55125  
RVR Phone: 651-439-2558  
Email: [info@rivervalleyriders.org](mailto:info@rivervalleyriders.org)  
Web: [www.rivervalleyriders.org](http://www.rivervalleyriders.org)

**Therapeutic Riding Locations:**

***Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday evenings:***

**RVR Owned Afton Site**  
2007 Neal Avenue South  
Afton, MN  
Phone: 651-439-2558

***Tuesday evenings:***

**North Metro Site**  
14323 Ostrum Trail North  
Marine on Saint Croix, MN  
Phone: 651-341-7138

**Therapeutic Carriage Driving Location:**

***Monday and Thursday afternoons/evenings:***

**RVR Owned Afton Site**  
2007 Neal Avenue South  
Afton, MN  
Phone: 651-439-2558

## HOW WE HELP

We firmly believe that **everyone** who participates in our program can benefit from the experience.

### RIDERS & DRIVERS

River Valley Riders provides a unique and motivating experience, contributing positively to the physical, social and communication skills of people with disabilities.

#### Physical Benefits:

- The gentle three-dimensional movement of the horse, which simulates human walking, serves to strengthen core body muscles, improve posture and coordination, and increase overall balance and joint mobility.

#### Social Skills:

- As the rider/driver learns to control the horse there is a feeling of true accomplishment. This personal achievement translates into improved self-confidence and self-esteem.
- A trusting and affectionate relationship often develops between the horse, rider/driver, and volunteers, which can carry over with the person's ability to relate better with other people.

#### Communication Abilities:

- The riding/driving experience stimulates language and learning. The rider/driver develops the ability to listen to instructions and communicate directions to the horse.
- Concentration and memory are potentially improved as the rider/driver attends each session and carries over techniques from week to week.

### HORSES

Horses are intelligent, social, and affectionate creatures. RVR horses enjoy lots of attention from all their human friends here in the program. They often form deep bonds of affection with their riders and drivers and show an amazing awareness of our students' special needs. Finally, like most of us, our horses enjoy a break in routine — RVR offers them variety and a fun challenge.

### VOLUNTEERS

- The satisfaction of knowing you have assisted a person with special needs to participate in a therapeutic horseback riding and carriage driving program.
- Opportunity to volunteer with horses, and meet other people who enjoy being around horses.
- Gain "hands on" experience in a therapeutic recreational setting working with people who have disabilities.
- Good for your health.
- Career exploration.
- Mileage is tax deductible, as is any donation.
- Fulfills school/church requests for service.

## HOW YOU CAN HELP

There are many ways you can help RVR carry out its mission. During therapeutic horseback riding lessons, the main jobs are horse leader and sidewalker. You will find detailed descriptions of these volunteer jobs on the following pages. But there are other critical tasks to perform. Volunteers can also clean and maintain tack, groom horses and work at activity stations during the lessons. You don't need equine experience to volunteer for these activities — just a willingness to learn.

And, like any non-profit organization, River Valley Riders has many administrative, communications, fundraising, promotional and community-outreach tasks that need to be done. If you have special background or skills in any of these areas, we'd love to have your help!

**The riders, drivers and horses all count on RVR's volunteers to make the program successful.**

**We MUST be able to count on you for the 3 C's:**

### **Commitment**

- We need you and count on you, so please show up at your appointed time and place, and please sign in.
- Know the number to call if you need to miss your volunteer assignment and call as early as possible.

### **Confidentiality**

- We maintain rider/driver information as confidential.
- We hope you tell others about what you do here, but never talk about rider/driver in any way that they can be identified unless you have their permission and/or the permission of their parent.

### **Conduct**

- All people and horses will be treated with dignity and respect.
- Read and refer to this handbook.
- Many of our rider/drivers are legally vulnerable. To help assure safety, we require volunteers 18 years and older to complete a background check.
- The vulnerability issue can work both ways; you, as a volunteer can also be vulnerable. Verbal, physical or emotional abuse will not be tolerated and should be reported to an instructor or therapist immediately,
- Understand and follow the requests of the instructor without interference.

### **Policy of Drug-Free Awareness**

River Valley Riders is committed to a drug-free program. Volunteering while under the influence of illegal drugs or alcohol is prohibited and will lead to dismissal. Any suspicions of illegal drug use or use of alcohol by a volunteer should be reported to an instructor. All RVR sites are smoke free and vaping is not allowed.

### **Volunteer Background Checks**

River Valley Riders is committed to creating a safe environment for children and adults with special needs. Criminal background checks are one strategy we use to ensure safety for our participants. River Valley Riders' policy is to conduct criminal background checks on all adult volunteers and to repeat criminal background checks every 3 years. The McDowell Agency in St. Paul conducts the background checks. They conduct background checks for more than 1,400 organizations and are the largest provider of background checks for Minnesota nonprofits. River Valley Riders pays the fee for background checks. There is no cost to the volunteer. Volunteers will be provided with a password and written instructions showing screen-by-screen how to enter information on the website. Plan to spend 5 – 10 minutes entering your information on the website.

**In return, as a volunteer, you can always count on RVR for your right to...**

- A clear job description with an appropriate volunteer placement.
- Information and training you need to do your job successfully.
- Supervision and open communication from the instructor(s).
- Have confidence to ask questions—get answers and receive feedback (“How am I doing?”)
- Be recognized for your achievements.

## VOLUNTEER JOB DESCRIPTIONS

### POSITION TITLE: SIDEWALKER

**OBJECTIVE/PURPOSE:** To work with people who have disabilities in a safe horseback riding program.

**SUPERVISOR:** Instructors

**RESPONSIBILITIES: (See Appendix I for more details)**

- Arrive 15 minutes before the start of your assigned session.
- Check schedule board for changes and wait for assigned rider.
- Find rider, assist rider with helmet, and wait with rider.
- Relay instructions to the rider, if needed.
- At the end of the session, walk with rider back to their parent/guardian.
- Help with equipment before or after session.
- Wear proper clothing (i.e., supportive and protective footwear: closed toe/closed back shoes or boots; casual and appropriate dress code: no short shorts; no low cut or tank tops).
- For your safety, please tie back long hair and limit the wearing of jewelry.
- Follow directions from instructor and ask questions.
- Record volunteer hours and rider progress. Remember to ask the horse leader for input too.
- Convey feedback about another volunteer to the instructor only.
- Report any problems or concerns to the instructor.
- Stay with the rider at all times, their safety is your responsibility.
- After the rider has removed their helmet outside the arena, please ensure it is placed in the appropriate storage.
- Notify the lead instructor for absences, as early as possible. Or call the appropriate RVR phone number.

**SIDEWALKER TIPS:**

- Use the hold directed by instructor.
- Listen to and follow the instructions from the instructor.
- One sidewalker at a time gives instruction to rider. The sidewalker toward the inside of the arena reinforces instructions from the instructor if required.
- Reinforce quality of movement in warm-up exercises.
- Teach to the specific abilities of each rider. Be positive and encouraging. Address the rider by name. No pet names (honey, sweetie, etc.) and no baby talk.
- Allow rider time to process directions.
- Allow rider to initiate movement as much as possible. You may need to help by doing hand over hand.
- Challenge rider to move toward independence.
- Allow rider time to say hello/good-bye and thank you to the horse and volunteers.
- Pet your horse on their shoulder, **but do not pet horse during lesson time.**
- If a horse steps on your foot, please just quietly push the horse off your foot, do not become alarmed or hit the horse. Inform the instructor.
- If there is an incident, please tell the instructor and fill out an incident report.

**QUALIFICATIONS:**

- Comfortable working around horses.
- Attend training. Read and follow Volunteer Training Manual.
- Be able to walk/jog intermittently for up to 30 minutes and/or on uneven ground. Be able to lift your arm/shoulder height for up to 30 minutes.

**TIME COMMITMENT:**

- Once a week for one to four hour commitment between 4:30 -8:30 pm.
- You can also be a substitute.

**POSITION TITLE: HORSE LEADER**

**OBJECTIVE/PURPOSE:** To assist people with disabilities in a safe horseback riding program by leading the therapy horse.

**SUPERVISOR:** Instructors

**RESPONSIBILITIES: (See Appendix I for more details)**

- Arrive 15 minutes before your session begins.
- Check assignment board for changes.
- Find assigned horse, groom with brushes assigned to this horse and put on necessary tack. If you are unfamiliar with a piece of tack, please ask the instructor for assistance/training. Warm up the horse in the arena or at least walk the horse in a safe area to connect with horse. Do some stops and starts.
- Remember the horse is depending on you to be the leader – they want to follow your directions.
- Wear proper clothing (i.e., supportive and protective footwear: closed toe/closed back shoes or boots; casual and appropriate dress code: no short shorts; no low cut or tank tops).
- For your safety, please tie back long hair and limit the wearing of jewelry.
- Follow directions from instructor and ask questions.
- Return equipment at the end of the night.
- Record volunteer hours.
- Convey feedback about another volunteer to the instructor only.
- Report any problems or concerns with horse or equipment to the instructor.
- Notify the lead instructor for absences, as early as possible. Or call the appropriate RVR phone number.

**WHEN LEADING A THERAPY HORSE:**

- Use 8-12" of lead rope; fold remainder in figure 8 (**do not wrap or loop around your hand**).
- Walk at a comfortable pace for horse. You should walk even with the horses' ears. That way you will have 3-way sensory inputs – Vision ahead/side; Ear to Sidewalker and Ear to Instructor.
- If a Time Out is called by the instructor, please stop your horse right where you are. If possible, remain stopped until instructed to move on.
- Stand in front of horse, facing the horse, when the horse is at the halt.
- Avoid loud, rough discipline of the horse. Riders may mimic you and try to punish the horse themselves. Tell the instructor about the behavior so it can be addressed properly.
- If the horse steps on your toe, count to five while pushing your weight into his shoulder, he should step off. Do not yell, hit or otherwise scare the rider or horse.
- Talk to the horse and limit your conversation to the rider. Do not turn around to talk to the rider/sidewalkers.
- Walk to the center of the arena and halt if a problem arises.
- ALWAYS stay with the horse and maintain control.
- Walk on the side of the horse that is toward the center of the arena. This helps you to hear the instructor and see the activity.
- Be alert to where sidewalkers are at all times (watch out for puddles, fences, other horses, etc.).
- Tie horse with the RVR quick release knot at the place appropriate to each riding site. Have the instructor check your knot. Do not add loops.
- Make sure horses have adequate space between them.
- If you are not comfortable with your assigned horse, please tell the instructor immediately.
- If there is an incident, please tell the instructor and fill out an incident report.

**QUALIFICATIONS:**

- Attend training. Read and follow Volunteer Training Manual.
- Be experienced working with horses and with basic horse knowledge.
- Be able to walk/jog intermittently for up to 30 minutes and/or on uneven ground.

**TIME COMMITMENT:**

- Once a week for one to four hour commitment between 4:30-8:30pm.
- You can also sign-up to be a substitute.

## SAFETY FIRST!

### BASIC SAFETY RULES

At RVR our top priority is to provide a safe environment for all of those involved. Working with horses is a risk activity and policies have been developed to minimize the risk. Safety at RVR is EVERYONE's responsibility and we take it very seriously.

- Wear supportive boots or enclosed shoes when working around a horse.
- For your safety, please tie back long hair and limit the wearing of jewelry.
- Attempt to know the horse, his temperament and reactions. Read the evaluation sheet on the horse and talk to the owner if possible.
- For the safety of the riders, only people with horse experience and who have been recommended by the instructor may lead a horse during a class.
- If you need to carry a cell phone, you must put it on **vibrate only** and **NO TEXTING** while you are doing your volunteer duties!
- Best to pet the horse on the neck or shoulder.
- When leading a horse, always walk along side of his head, not in front of him.
- Do not let your horse eat during the lesson or on trail rides.
- Do not tie horses unless instructors have approved your technique.
- Do not bring treats for the horses.
- All riders and drivers must wear helmets when mounted or near a horse.
- Gate to the arena must remain closed during lessons.
- No horses are to be tied inside the arena during the lesson.
- No pets allowed, except Service Animals.
- Always approach a horse from the front or side, never from the rear. Remember the horse cannot see directly behind and you may be kicked.
- Always speak to a horse when approaching or touching him. Remember, if you startle the horse, they may jump or kick.
- **Refer to Seizure Protocol sheet.** If a rider has a seizure while mounted, stop the horse. Many seizures are very mild and will not negatively affect the rider once it is over. If it is a tonic-clonic (grand mal) type (major shaking, losing consciousness) support the rider on the horse with an over the thigh hold until the instructor can dismount the rider or assist you in dismounting them. Place the rider on their side on the ground away from the horse or any obstacles. All other horses will remain stopped until given directions by the instructor.
- Talk to the instructor about any questions or concerns.

**To protect the safety of riders, families, volunteers, and horses – group riding lessons may be canceled for:**

- **Severe Weather (Thunderstorms, Excessive Wind or Tornadoes)**
- **Temperature considerations will be at the discretion of the Instructor team.**

**If these weather conditions are present or possible, please call into the RVR phone line 651-439-2558 after 3:30pm to find out if lessons are canceled.** The voice mail message will be updated to specifically state if lessons are canceled. On days with changing weather conditions, please call the line again to confirm lessons have not been canceled before you leave home. The safety of our riders, families, volunteers, and horses is our most important concern.

## EMERGENCY ACTION PLANS

**Specific site emergency action plans are located at each lesson site in a designated folder.**

### Fire

R = RESCUE

A = ALERT

C = CONFINE the fire

E = EXTINGUISH the fire, if safe to do so

### Tornado

- In the case of unexpected severe weather pending, evacuation of the site is preferred, if time allows.
- If on site, move out of any structures and stay away from trees.
- Get down into a low place and cover your head. Use ditches on south side of property.
- Assist staff with moving clients and visitors to a safe place.
- RVR owned horses remove lead ropes and turn horses loose in the paddocks. Non RVR owned horses up to the owners to determine best action.

### Client or Volunteer Injury

- Do not move the person unless it is necessary to save their life.
- Clear other riders/drivers, volunteers and all horses from the area.
- Instructor will designate someone to call 911, if appropriate, and tell them who, what, where, when and the situation.
- If anyone is injured, find the emergency contact name and number from registration application form and call the person listed as their emergency contact.
- Fill out an accident/injury form with the assistance of the instructor.

## SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram offer great opportunities to stay connected to the happenings at River Valley Riders. Please follow these guidelines for posting:

- Keep postings respectful and relevant.
- Avoid spam or topics that are unrelated to River Valley Riders.
- Share your stories, but remember that River Valley Riders strives to maintain privacy for our riders and drivers. Please do not tag people in photos.
- Please do not post solicitations.
- River Valley Riders reserves the right to remove inappropriate postings.

Should you have questions or concerns please call 651-439-2558 and we will return your call.



## CLOSING THOUGHTS

Smiles say a thousand words — only louder.

Acknowledge efforts of the rider/driver and encourage independence.

Promptness and reliability are key to a program's success.

Patience & Praise = Success & Results.

Respect everyone's right to confidentiality.

Do not suffer through a personality clash. Ask to be reassigned.

Check the schedule board for changes.

Mark your volunteer hours.

Remember: your dedication and sincerity make a world of difference.

**THANK YOU!**

APPENDIX I LEADER & SIDEWALKER

**Follow the Leader**

*By: Susan F. Tucker, NARHA Accreditation Committee*

As a volunteer, one of the most challenging duties you could be assigned is the position of leader. A leader's first responsibility is the horse but you must also constantly be aware of the rider, instructor, and any potential hazards in or around the arena. In addition, you must also consider the side-walkers, making sure there is enough room along the fence, and around obstacles for them to pass.

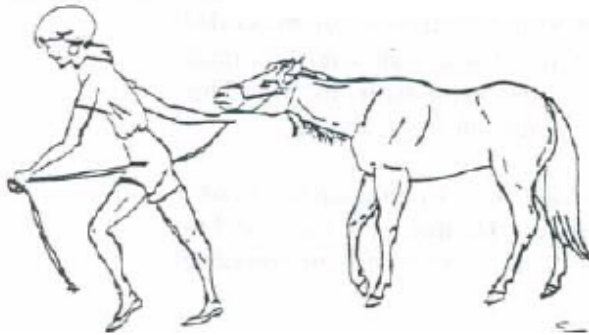


Figure A

An effective leader pays close attention to the rider's needs as well as to where the horse is going. This reinforces the rider's attempts to control the horse. However, you should not execute an instruction for the rider before he has time to process the information and make an effort to comply. Some times it may be appropriate to walk into the corner and stand until the student figures out what to do.

Avoid the temptation to talk to the rider and/or sidewalkers. A rider may get confused by too much input and not know who's in charge. (Instructors often make terrible leaders because they can't keep their mouths shut!)

Figure A depicts a few faults common among leaders. Here is a leader grimly marching alone—head down, one hand on the lead snap, the other inside the coiled end of the rope—dragging a strung-out horse. In a battle with a horse, you lose. You must get the horse to cooperate. Walk alongside the horse, about even with his eye. This helps keep him in a proper frame, which is more beneficial for everyone.

Talk to the horse; most of them know "whoa", "walk", and "trot", or can learn the words. Watch where you're going and what's happening around you. Do not walk backward to look at the rider. It's dangerous for everyone and the horse isn't eager to follow someone who can't see where he is going.

Figure B shows the correct position for leaders. The lead shank is held with the right hand 6-12 inches from the snap, allowing free motion of the horse's head. This is more therapeutic to the rider and less irritating to

The horse can set himself against a steady pull, but tugs keep in awake. Move out, about 1,000 steps per 15 minutes, to provide the most therapeutic benefit.

When you halt for more than a few seconds, stand in front of the horse with your hands on the halter's cheek piece (if the horse permits) or loosely hold the lead or reins. Standing in front is a psychological barrier to the horse and he will stand more quietly than if he has an easy chance to move out. If you like your thumbs, don't put them through the snaffle or halter rings.

If the worst happens and there is an accident, stay with the horse. There are other people to care for a fallen rider. The situation could easily become more dangerous if there are loose horses running around the arena. Move your horse as far from the fallen student as possible and keep calm. Listen for the instructor's directions.

These suggestions can help you control your horse, be a good aide to the rider and be a valuable assistant to an instructor. You will provide real therapeutic input to your rider, as well as make it safe for them to have fun riding. In short, if you lead, we'll be happy to follow.

the horse.

The tail end of the lead should be looped in a figure-eight in the left hand to avoid tripping on it. Never coil the rope around your hand. That could end a close relationship with your fingers!

Use short tugs rather than a steady pull to keep the horse moving.

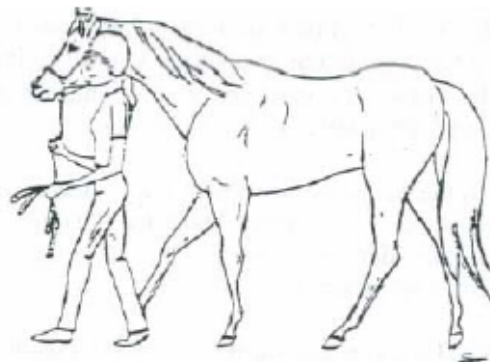


Figure B

## APPENDIX I LEADER & SIDEWALKER

### Effective Sidewalking

By: *Susan Tucker and Molly Lingua, R.P.T.*

Sidewalkers are the ones who normally get the most hands-on duties in therapeutic riding. They are directly responsible for the rider. As such, they have the capability to either enhance or detract from the lesson.

In the arena, the sidewalker should help the student focus his/her attention on the instructor. Try to avoid unnecessary talking with either the rider or other volunteers. Too much input from too many directions is very confusing to anyone, and to riders who already have perceptual problems, it can be overwhelming. If two sidewalkers are working with one student, one should be the "designated talker" to avoid this situation.

When the instructor gives a direction, allow your student plenty of time to process it. If the instructor says "Turn to the right toward me," and the student seems confused, gently tap the right hand and say, "Right," to reinforce the command. You will get to

know the riders and learn when they need help and when they're just not paying attention.

It is important to maintain a position by the rider's knee. Being too far forward or back will make it very difficult to assist with instructions or provide security if the horse should trip or shy.

There are two ways to hold onto the rider without interfering. The most commonly used is the "arm-over-the-thigh" hold. The sidewalker grips the front of the saddle (flap or pommel depending on the horse's size) with the hand closest to the rider. Then the fleshy part of the forearm rests gently on the rider's thigh. Be careful that the elbow doesn't accidentally dig into the rider's leg.

Sometimes, pressure on the thigh can increase and/or cause muscle spasticity, especially with the Cerebral Palsy population. In this case, the "therapeutic hold" may be used. Here, the leg is held at the joints, usually the knee and/or ankle, check with the instructor/therapist for the best way to

assist. In the (unlikely) event of an emergency, the arm-over thigh hold is the most secure.

Avoid wrapping an arm around the rider's waist. It is tempting, especially when walking beside a pony with a young or small rider, but it can offer too much and uneven support. At times, it can even pull the rider off balance and make riding more difficult. Encourage your students to use their own trunk muscles to the best of their abilities.

If the instructor chooses to use a safety belt on your rider, be very careful not to pull down or push up on it. As your arm tires it's hard to avoid these movements, so rather than gripping the handle firmly, just touch your thumb and finger together around it. This way you are in position to assist the rider if needed, but you will neither give unneeded support nor pull him off balance. When you are ready for relief for your arm, ask the leader to move into the center to stop and trade sides, one at a time, with the other sidewalker. (Instructors: if your rider has serious enough balance problems to warrant a safety belt, you should probably be using two sidewalkers).

During exercises, pay attention to your student. Sometimes volunteers forget that the riders are to do the exercises and the sidewalkers are to reinforce and assist. The same applies to games. Don't get so competitive that your rider doesn't get to use his skills because you do it for him in an all out effort to win.

The ultimate goal for therapeutic riding is to encourage the rider to stretch and grow to be as normal as he can possibly be. You are right at his side, so help the instructor to challenge him to the best of his ability.

Without you, these programs couldn't exist. We thank you for all you give and challenge you to be the best you can be.

