

**SARASOTA MANATEE ASSOCIATION
FOR
RIDING THERAPY**

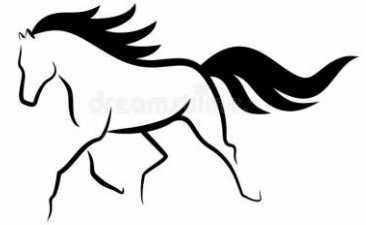


VOLUNTEER MANUAL

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Welcome!



Thank you for your interest in becoming a member of the SMART volunteer team. By making a commitment to volunteer your valuable time and gifts you will directly help to improve the lives of many children and adults with special needs in our community. We hope that in doing so, you will find that your own life will be enhanced as well.

All of us at SMART are proud of the fine work we do, and the extraordinary results that we see. If you would like to move forward and volunteer, we welcome you as a valued member of the SMART family of volunteers and beloved herd.

Following a required orientation, you will be given the opportunity to choose how you would like to serve. SMART will provide training, much of what you will learn is by shadowing and learning from our experienced volunteers. This is a great way to get to know each other and build a relationship of trust. Much of what we do takes time, practice and patience to learn the SMART way of doing things consistently. If you have questions, please don't hesitate to ask.

We want you to know that every person you are helping at SMART is aware of and grateful for your time and commitment to serve. Without our dedicated volunteers, this program would not exist. We truly appreciate and value every member of our SMART family.

History of the organization:

SMART has been in existence as a not for profit, 501 (c) 3 Organization since 1987 and serves several hundred children and adults with special needs each year. SMART's original founder, Betsy London-Fish started SMART shortly after she observed striking improvements in one of her young riding students who was dealing with the challenges of Cerebral Palsy. SMART moved several times over the years. In 1993 SMART relocated to property owned by Sarah Clark, the executive director at the time. The Hunsader family bought the property and provided SMART with a free lease from 1996-2011. In December 2011, SMART purchased the 23-acre horse farm we currently call home. SMART is a Premier Center of the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship, Int'l (PATH Int'l).

MISSION STATEMENT:

Enriching the lives of people with special needs through therapeutic horse-related programs.

At SMART, we strive to improve the quality of the lives of our SMART Riders and their families through therapeutic horseback riding, carriage driving and equine assisted activities.

Through respectful partnerships with our horses, we create an environment that promotes a life of inclusion, respect, growth and independence.

What's so beneficial about equine assisted activities?

SMART provides adaptive horseback riding and equine assisted activities to our participants. A physical, cognitive, or emotional special need does not limit a person from interacting with horses. In fact, such interactions can prove quite rewarding. Individuals of all ages who participate in these programs can experience physical and emotional rewards.

During this fun and enjoyable time, much more is learned than just how to ride a horse. The lessons may include learning about horses, how they interact with each other and their environment. Participants may learn how to groom a horse and how to correctly halter and lead a horse. When grooming and caring for their horse, they learn the importance of clean stalls and fresh water. Over time, a bond of trust and affection is established between participant and horse.

For those who ride, they may help to tack their horse before they move to one of our arenas for their lesson. During the lesson, riders participate in mounted exercises to stretch and relax them, learning to use their voice, legs, and hands to communicate with and to guide and control their horse. The gentle rhythmical movements of the horse stimulate all the muscles of the rider that would be used if they were walking; so, riders with physical needs often show improvement in flexibility, balance, muscle strength, circulation and breathing. Learning to ride a horse has psychological benefits, as each rider gains a sense of accomplishment and achievement. The lessons also include playing games to promote teamwork and camaraderie.

Ground based equine assisted activities allow participants to interact with SMART's herd of therapy horses in a setting that promotes an understanding of the lifestyle that goes along with maintaining the horses and the farm they live on. These activities provide opportunities to teach critical life and communication skills, while fostering self-esteem and self-confidence.

A respectful and affectionate connection with our horses is fostered. Teamwork also develops between all the students in SMART lessons. The instructor becomes a role model, as well as a mentor.

With the special needs of our participants in mind, and the creative caring on the part of our instructors and volunteers, we use the movement of the horse, the connection to the horse and the natural environment to help heal the body, mind and spirit of every SMART participant.

GENERAL GUIDELINES

R-E-S-P-E-C-T

Volunteers – As an all-volunteer organization, teamwork is an important part of our continued success. We couldn't do it without mutually respecting each other and the role we play.

Participants – Please treat them with RESPECT. Talk to them appropriately for their age. Use positive rather than negative reinforcement. Be patient and allow time for them to process what you have asked. Be understanding, but if you are uncomfortable or can't handle a situation, ask the instructor for help.

- Safety First – always be aware of your surroundings and be proactive ensuring participants are safe at all times.
- Boundary Awareness – Do not touch a participant unless it is necessary and asking first. Guide with their sleeve not their arm.
- Sensory Awareness – Many participants are sensory sensitive; this includes sight, sound, touch, smell, taste, balance and body awareness. Remember to stay calm and relaxed and speak with a soft tone. Usually, clear direction with fewer words is best.

Horses – We treat our horses GENTLY. Never kick or hit a horse. If a reprimand or schooling is necessary, an Instructor or Staff person will handle the situation. If you are having a problem with a horse or feel there is a safety issue, tell the Instructor.

Some Basic “Do’s”

Foster Independence – One of the most challenging aspects of volunteering and working with our participants is standing back and letting them do things themselves. We want to empower each of them to achieve all that they can. Assist when needed or asked, or see a dangerous situation arising, but encourage independence.

Make the most of your time – Not every volunteer task is glamorous, but every task is necessary! There is always plenty to do in caring for the horses and the barns; dump, clean and fill water buckets, muck stalls, sweep and the list goes on.... Our horses depend on the volunteers to care for them, and all deserve the same amount of attention as if they were in

their owner's back yard. So, while some may think all the details aren't important, we have a barn full of horses that would beg to differ.

Confidentiality – Please remember our Confidentiality Policy. We know you are excited about what you do here and want to share it with others. Please do so in a respectful way that does not identify participants (do not use their names or specific personal information) and protect their right to privacy. Before you take photos while you are at SMART, please clear it with a Staff person. Some participants do not have photo releases and should not be photographed for personal safety reasons. Do NOT post participant photos on your social media unless you are sharing posts from SMART's Facebook page.

Cell Phones – SMART is a cell phone free zone. Do not use cell phones in any areas where there are students or horses (barn, grooming, tack room, mounting areas, arenas, fields & paddocks, etc.) Please leave your cell phone in your car or turn your phone OFF when you arrive and keep it on you. Using your cell phone while volunteering takes your attention away from your very important job – and compromises the safety of our participants, horses and other volunteers. If you are expecting an important call that cannot wait until after you are finished with your shift, please let the Staff know before you start volunteering, and plan to wait in the Pavilion to take the call.

Shift Responsibility – We depend on you to be here. We understand unexpected situations arise; but if you can't be here, please contact us as soon as possible so we can arrange a substitute. We truly appreciate your commitment and your consideration.

Documenting your hours – Please don't forget to sign in – your hours are important!!!

- Volunteer hours help to make SMART eligible for certain kinds of funding.
- Your hours are noted by SMART for use in volunteer recognition and rewards.
- If you are getting school credit for volunteering, we need proof that you were here. We are happy to sign off on hours that are recorded in the Ready Room.

Dress Code – Although "dirt happens" at a barn, please remember that particularly during lessons and programming we are representing SMART, and as such, we try to present ourselves as neat and professional as possible. The following dress code is to both foster a professional atmosphere as well as keep everyone safe from injury.

- Please wear long pants/jeans and SMART T-shirt or shirt with appropriate coverage. Shorts and tank tops are not permitted.
- Please wear closed toe shoes to prevent foot injury.
- Avoid loose clothing and jewelry, as it can be obstructive and cause injury.
- We strongly recommend wearing sunglasses and/or a hat to protect your eyes.
- Sunscreen is strongly recommended throughout the year.
- Insect repellent may also be needed.

Beverages – Stay hydrated! If you need a break, please feel free to take one. Please remember that chewing gum, eating, and drinking are not allowed while working with the horses and/or participants. This is both for your safety and the safety of others.

Pets – We love pets – but for safety reasons we ask that you please keep your dogs and other pets at home. Our horses are not used to having other animals around and it can be very distracting to them as well as our participants.

Smoking and Alcohol Consumption – SMART is a smoke and alcohol-free facility. Please do not smoke or use other tobacco products on the property, and please refrain from volunteering after the consumption of alcohol.

Ask!!! – There is no such thing as a stupid question!! If you are ever in doubt about anything or just want to know more information about a particular matter, feel free to ask an Instructor or Staff. We welcome questions.

....and most important of all...Have fun!!

Smile, laugh, and enjoy yourself.

Your enthusiasm is contagious!!

Respectful Disability Language

"The difference between the right word and the almost-right word is the difference between lightning and a lightning bug." - Mark Twain

What does "Respectful Disability Language" Mean?

The Disability Rights Movement advocates for positive changes in society. It also means improving how people with disabilities are talked about in everyday conversations. It's important that people are aware of the meaning behind the words they use when talking to, referring to, or working with persons with disabilities. Disrespectful language can make people feel excluded and can be a barrier to full participation.

When does Language = Power?

Imagine living your whole life always having to explain why the words that people use are hurtful and offensive to you. People with disabilities want respect and acceptance. Ultimately, people with disabilities decide how their disability should be stated.

Disability affects all people. Learn respectful language and teach others.

General Guidelines for Talking about Disability

- Refer to a person's disability only when it is related to what you are talking about. For example, don't ask "What's wrong with you?" Don't refer to people in general or generic terms such as "the girl in the wheelchair."
- When talking about places with accommodations for people with disabilities, use the term "accessible" rather than "disabled" or "handicapped." For example, refer to an "accessible" parking space rather than a "disabled" or "handicapped" parking space or "an accessible bathroom stall" rather than "a handicapped bathroom stall."
- Use the term "atypical," and take the following terms out of your vocabulary when talking about or talking to people with disabilities. Don't use the terms "handicapped," "differently-abled," "cripple," "crippled," "victim," "retarded," "stricken," "poor," or "unfortunate".

- Just because someone has a disability, it doesn't mean he/she is "courageous," "brave," "special," or "superhuman." People with disabilities are the same as everyone else. It is not unusual for someone with a disability to have talents, skills, and abilities.
- It is okay to use words or phrases such as "disabled," "disability," or "people with disabilities" when talking about disability issues. Ask the people you are with which term they prefer if they have a disability.
- When talking about people without disabilities, it is okay to say, "people without disabilities." But do not refer to them as "normal" or "healthy." These terms can make people with disabilities feel as though there is something wrong with them and that they are "abnormal."
- When in doubt, call an atypical person by his/her name.