



# INTRODUCTION TO VOLUNTEERING AT AWH

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## About AHEAD With Horses (AWH)

AHEAD stands for: Accelerated Habilitation Education And Development. AWH was founded in 1968 and has over 50 years of experience serving our community as a leading non-profit developmental therapeutic riding program for children with disabilities.

## OUR MISSION & VISION

AHEAD With Horses is devoted to improving the quality of life of disabled, disadvantaged, and special needs children through equine therapy using vaulting also known as gymnastics on a horse.

Whether it's seeing a smile from an otherwise "non-responsive" child, or watching someone taking their first steps, the hundreds of children we serve each year regularly hit major physical, mental, and emotional milestones—gifts that last a lifetime.

## WHO WE SERVE

At AWH, we are experienced in working with children with various disabilities including, but not limited to:

- Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)
- Blind / visual impairments
- Deaf & hearing impaired
- Developmental delays
- Down syndrome
- Cerebral palsy
- Chromosome disorders
- Cognitive disabilities
- Congenital disabilities
- Hypotonia
- Muscular dystrophy
- Paraplegia & quadriplegia
- Seizure disorders/epilepsy
- Spina bifida
- Speech disabilities

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## VOLUNTEER ROLES

Aside from the horses, volunteers are the single most important part of any therapeutic program activity. Without dedicated people to help groom, tack and lead horses, encourage and walk beside riders, and many other important tasks, AHEAD With Horses could not exist.

## Necessary Requirements

- Must be at least 12 years old
- Must be able to walk for several hours including frequent stopping
- Must attend Volunteer Orientation session
- After training, able to perform tasks with minimal supervision
- Able to accept constructive feedback and have a positive attitude
- Horse knowledge and experience is helpful, but not necessary
- Willing to learn and follow AWH policies, procedures, and dress code

## Lesson Volunteers

- Must be at least 12 years old
- Assist as a side-walker/spotter during lessons
- Capable of performing all tasks assigned
- Walk along side the student to assist with student positioning on the horse
- Ensure student safety throughout the lesson and in an emergency
- Assist with mounting and dismounting
- Help instructor as necessary with games, movements, motivation, etc.
- May be instructed to lead horses as necessary during lessons
- Must be able to respond to Instructor's directions

## Horse Volunteers

- Must be at least 12 years old
- Must be able to walk for several hours including frequent stopping
- Previous horse experience preferred
- Lead horses during lessons
- Prepare horses for lessons (possible)
  - Groom, tack, and bring horses to and from their stalls
- Care for horses following lessons (possible)
  - Untack, groom or rinse as necessary, and return horses to their stalls
- Help instructor as necessary with games, movements, motivation, etc.
- Must be able to respond to Instructor's directions.

## Assistant Instructors

- Must be at least 16 years old
- Must have a minimum of 40 hours as a lesson or horse volunteer
- Previous experience or education with children and/or disabilities is preferred
- Assist the instructor with lessons as directed, working towards the goal of being able to teach lessons independently

## Instructors

- Must be at least 18 years old or older

- Must have a minimum of 80 hours as a lesson or horse volunteer or assistant instructor
- Will be responsible for his/her own students including planning and evaluating each lesson to suit individual needs
- Will incorporate basic physical, behavioral, and language therapy into lessons

## Specialty Volunteers

We're always looking for additional volunteers to help with:

- Website development and/or maintenance
- Office work, including: computer work, filing, and/or mailing
- Fundraising:
  - Grant writing or grant research
  - Brainstorming new ideas, planning, and/or event help
- Contact companies to ask for donations (monetary and in-kind)
  - Examples: items for our silent auction, trees, plants, bottled water, grooming equipment, etc.
- Public speaking to donor clubs/organizations and volunteer/information fairs
- Landscaping or other work around the property
- Photographers to take pictures at our events
- Interns: we can work with schools and students to create internships based on your studies and interest. Please speak with us for details

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## RULES OF CONDUCT

As a volunteer, you are representing AHEAD With Horses at all times so we ask that you follow all rules accordingly.

1. No alcohol or drugs. AWH is a drug free workplace
2. No smoking. Smoking is absolutely prohibited
3. No gum chewing, eating or drinking (except water) in front of students
4. Conversation during lessons must be focused on the student
5. Please keep personal conversations for breaks and away from students
6. No cursing, swearing or bad language. Remember that we are working with children and this will never be tolerated around students
7. No running or yelling on the property. We do not want to scare the children or the horses
8. Be prepared for your entire shift
9. Be on time or early
10. Bring plenty of water
11. Bring a lunch or snacks if staying all day, since there is no food or vending machines available on the property and meals are not provided

12. Be aware that students have individual needs. If instructors are talking and singing and being entertaining... join in! If instructors are being quiet with a student, please ask before engaging them. We may feel less entertaining today and would love for you to bring the energy, or the student might be easily over-stimulated and require a quieter and calmer environment
13. Turn all phones and other devices to vibrate or silent. Loud ring tones or beeps can scare horses and students, or interrupt the lesson. You should not have your phone out to play a game, watch a video, etc. Your attention should be on the horse and/or lesson going on. Headphones must not be worn around the horses. You have to be able to hear your surroundings

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## DRESS CODE

- Closed-toe shoes are required. Boots or tennis shoes preferred. Make sure they are comfortable because you will be doing a lot of walking
- Long pants. Jeans recommended. (NO SHORTS)
- Shirts with sleeves. Shoulders should be covered. (No tank tops; T-shirts are fine.)
- Dress for the weather:
  - Hats, sunglasses, and sunscreen recommended year round
  - Sweatshirts and jackets are recommended in the winter
- No loose or baggy clothing that could get caught on students, tack, or horses
- Keep jewelry to a minimum to keep it from being caught or pulled by students or horses
- Be prepared to work in a dirty, dusty, and/or muddy outdoor environment
- Don't tie sweatshirts, jackets, or other garments around the waist or neck
  - Instead, remove it from the lesson area
- Leave all purses and backpacks in the car or on the lunch tables and/or benches

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## TIME COMMITMENT

It is ideal that volunteers maintain a consistent schedule. That's not to say you can't help us on an irregular basis! When we do have recurring volunteers, it helps our instructors plan days accordingly. More importantly, volunteers build relationships and trust with the students which is very beneficial to their performances during lessons.

Volunteers are appreciated for the entire day, but if you can only give an hour or two of your time, we are thankful for that too! We can discuss what works best for your schedule and come up with a plan.

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## LET'S GET STARTED!

We have a short orientation every Saturday morning at 8:45am in Shadow Hills. If Saturday mornings are not a possibility due to religious obligations or schedule conflicts, please call us at (818) 767-6373 and we will try and schedule an individual orientation. Full schedule is below.

### Shadow Hills Location

- Tuesday: 1:00 - 5:30 pm (every 2nd and 4th week of each month)
- Wednesday: 1:00 - 5:30 pm
- Saturday: 9:00 am - 2:30 pm (assuming you've completed orientation)

### Westside location (Sullivan Canyon, Brentwood)

- Thursday: 1:00 - 5:30 pm

AWH is closed on most major holidays and if it is raining. The schedule does change regularly due to number of students, seasons of the year and available daylight, and the volunteer's responsibilities.

Once you've read the *Horsemanship* and *Lessons Guide* found on our website in the Volunteer section, call us, or simply show up on a Saturday for orientation to get started. We look forward to seeing you soon!