



# *Special Equestrians, Inc.*

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## **Thank you for your interest in Special Equestrians!**

We are a therapeutic riding program providing services to mentally and physically challenged persons in Lee, Charlotte, Hendry, and Glades Counties in Southwest Florida since 1987. An all volunteer self-administrative organization, the program is affiliated with the North American Riding for the Handicapped Association. The association's therapeutic teaching techniques and safety standards are adhered to in every aspect of the program.

## **What Does Horseback Riding Accomplish?**

Doctors, therapists, instructors, and the disabled have become aware of the positive physical and mental benefits of horseback riding. The horse's movement provides the sensory input of a precise, repetitive pattern of movement very similar to the movement of a person's pelvis during normal human gait. The horse's center of gravity shifts forward, backward, up and down and side to side just as the human does. Riders have the four legs of the horse that they can direct as they wish, which conveys a sense of mobility and power not otherwise available to the physically and mentally challenged.

Additionally, muscle tone is improved through movements transmitted by the horse; and the body warmth of the horse aids muscle relaxation. Head and trunk postural control is encouraged and body symmetry (balance) is enhanced. The riding participants receive benefits relating to body awareness, spatial orientation, and endurance. Interestingly, there is also been found a beneficial effect on digestion. Contact with the horse demands constantly changing, adaptive responses and automatic self-correction by the rider resulting in increased responsiveness and adaptability.

The horse is a social creature that will readily bond with people. If you are kind to him, he will be kind to you. He will respond to you without caring if you can walk or talk; he does not care if your body works. He will love you because you are kind. That's all he needs. A rider's bonding with the horse can provide the motivation to do dramatic things. A ten year old autistic boy who had never spoken joined a riding program. After several months of riding, he was waiting in line for his turn and someone cut in front of him. In a very strong voice he said, "It's my turn." This wonderful moment was the beginning of his entry into the speaking world.

The lessons that we provide will help the students to gain self-confidence and self esteem. The horse will motivate the riders to strive for higher goals. The motivation that the riders achieve through their lessons frequently will carry over into their everyday lives and make their world a happier place.

## **How Can You Help?**

Special Equestrians cannot exist without volunteers. Our fund-raising efforts and nominal charge to riding clients does not cover the costs of maintaining our horses. We are grateful for our volunteers and we depend on them to run our program.

If you are comfortable around horses, we have many ways for you to contribute. You can groom and tack up the horses, lead the horses, be a sidewalker, or help maintain the stable area. We also have office work, fund-raising, and special events for those volunteers who do not want to work directly with the horses. Whatever direction you choose will be unique and rewarding. Join our team and share the joy!



## Volunteer Guidelines

Volunteers are the backbone of our program. Without you and the hours you put into Special Equestrians, we would not be able to provide these special opportunities to our clients. Thank you.

NARHA (North American Riding for the Handicapped Association) provides us with national accreditation and guidelines of operations to encourage safety for you and our clients. Always be alert and think safety. Please don't be offended if the instructor offers comments or suggestions. The safety of our riding clients is paramount to the success of our program.

Please remember that although our horses are very trustworthy, strange situations can cause panic. Cameras with flashes, shrill voices and sudden moves by people or other horses can cause problems. Always approach the horse from the side rather than directly from the rear. This enables the horse to anticipate your arrival. Talk calmly to the animal as you approach. If you walk behind a horse, be well away and talk as you walk. There should not be groups standing and chatting around the horses.

Only one parent/guardian is allowed with the rider when they go on the mounting ramp. Siblings, friends, and visitors must stay in the viewing area. Volunteers should remain in the viewing area, except when performing a specific duty.

1. You must be at least 14 years old, with horse experience or the willingness to learn.
2. You should be physically fit and able to trot along with a student in a lesson.
3. It is wise to keep your tetanus shots up to date.
4. Please wear closed shoes and neat comfortable clothes.
5. You will receive orientation and training to explain the safety and procedural rules of the program.
6. You will need to fill out an application form and the emergency medical treatment form before you begin your work.
7. Volunteers should be able to do the following:
  - Work cooperatively with all of our personnel.
  - Arrive on time and give advance notice by calling our office (239-226-1221), if you are unable to make your scheduled time.
  - Accept full responsibility for any task you undertake and follow it through to its conclusion.
  - Grow and learn and HAVE FUN.
8. We would like our volunteers to look at their involvement with Special Equestrians as a professional responsibility. We are interested in your opinions, comments, and input. We want this to be a collaborative effort, as you are a very important part of Special Equestrians.
9. We expect you to be very careful about the confidential nature of many things in our program. Never discuss our students' disabilities with outsiders.
10. Be honest about your feelings and sensitive to others' feelings. Above all, be yourself.



## **Special Equestrians Safety Rules and Regulations For Participants, Parents, Caregivers, Visitors, Volunteers and Staff**

In order for Special Equestrians to protect its participants and visitors, as well as for insurance purposes, we request that you follow this set of rules. These rules are designed to ensure the safety of our participants, parents, caregivers, visitors, volunteers and staff. Thank you for your cooperation.

1. The instructor requires your complete attention at all times.
2. **DO NOT WALK BEHIND THE HORSES.**
3. Riders and parents may not enter the stable area unless they are accompanied and assisted by a volunteer or staff member.
4. Riders must wear safety helmets, long pants and closed-toe hard-soled shoes or boots. Helmets must be worn when riding, in the stable, and around the horses.
5. Do not feed the horses grass, carrots, apples, etc. unless you have permission from the instructor.
6. Only the Instructors and trained Staff will handle the mounting and dismounting of riders.
7. Only the Instructors and trained Staff will bridle and unbridle the horses.
8. In case of emergency, everyone will follow the directions given by the Instructor.
9. Children are not allowed to play on the ramp, mounting blocks, gates or fences.
10. Parents, Caregivers and Guests must stay in the viewing area, unless they are going to the bathroom.
11. Riders will stay in the viewing area until it is their time to ride. They will be taken up the ramp for mounting by the Instructor or trained Staff.
12. All riders are to be supervised by their caregivers or parents until handed over to the Staff.
13. Running, shouting and/or horseplay are not allowed.
14. Any bleeding or open sores must be covered with a bandage.
15. No chewing of gum when riding horses.
16. **Smoking is permitted only in the privacy of your car. Please do not drop butts on the ground.**
17. No pets are allowed on the property.
18. **Please obey all signs. They are there for your safety.**