

March 2023

VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK

Small Miracles



**Therapeutic Equestrian
Center, Inc.**

"For we walk by faith, not by sight."

Location

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WELCOME!!

Volunteers are truly the heart and muscle of Small Miracles and you, as a Small Miracles Volunteer, are vital to the success of each individual participating in this program! We hope you are as glad to be here as we are to have you!

Our staff strives to make your experience at Small Miracles rewarding and positive for both you and the participants. If you have any questions or concerns about your volunteer assignments, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Thank you for your willingness to help make a difference in the lives of others!

“Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much” ~Helen Keller

This guide is meant to help answer questions about our program, its purpose, policies and basic procedures.

Tennessee Equine Law Warning

Under Tennessee Law, an equine professional is not liable for an injury to or the death of a participant in equine activities resulting from the inherent risks of equine activities, pursuant to the Tennessee code annotated title 44, chapter 20, Part I.



Small Miracles' Mission

Small Miracles Therapeutic Equestrian Center, Inc. is a Christian-based, 501(c) 3 nonprofit founded through love with the mission to enhance the physical, social, emotional, cognitive and behavioral growth of individuals with special needs and disabilities through Equine-Assisted Services (EAS). Small Miracles is a trauma-responsive agency incorporating Trauma-Informed Care (TIC) practices in all of our EAS programs.

Trauma-Informed Care EAS incorporates the experience of equine/human interaction in an environment of non-judgmental learning and self-discovery. Through the grace of God and this unique collaboration that brings together horses, individuals with special needs and disabilities, caring volunteers and professionals, the lives of everyone involved are enriched.

We have been offering therapeutic equine-assisted services since 1995 and continue to grow in order to meet our community's ever-changing needs. Our programs include Therapeutic Horsemanship, Positive Youth Development, and Horses Empower Heroes. Therapeutic Horsemanship (TH) programs enhance the physical, social, emotional, cognitive and behavioral growth of individuals with special needs and disabilities such as, but not limited to, autism, Down syndrome, cerebral palsy, intellectual developmental disabilities; and neo-natal drug and fecal alcohol exposure through both mounted and unmounted EAS.

Trauma-Informed Care Positive Youth Development strengthens and enhances the social-emotional and cognitive growth of children and youth who have endured Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), prolonged stress and traumatic events. Our horses are very powerful in their intuitive ability to establish a connected, attuned relationship that instills hope, trust, belonging and resilience. Each component of this multi-faceted program helps to guide these students to intentional living and self-regulated positive behaviors. In turn, these lead to the achievement of both short- and long-term goals, breaking down disparity, poverty and dysfunctional family cycles.

Through trauma-focused, relationship-rich EAS, Horses Empower Heroes (HEH) strengthens the cognitive and social-emotional growth of military veterans leading to self-sufficiency, recovery and stability; as well as family and community re-integration. This mission is accomplished by encouraging the veterans' transition from a crippling survival-mode existence into a life filled with hope. The HEH motto is: It's not about surviving— it's about thriving!

All of our instructors are PATH, Intl. certified. Our programs operate year-round serving the Upper East Tennessee and Southwest Virginia areas. Lesson volunteers are scheduled Monday through Thursday for eight-week sessions. If possible, we ask our volunteers to commit to the entire eight-week session. All volunteers must be at least **14** years of age.

The Volunteer Coordinator will consult with you to decide where your abilities will best serve the program initially. Instructors will give individual assignments during classes. **Small Miracles reserves the right to place, re-assign, or dismiss volunteers based on the assessment of qualifications.**

There are other areas in which we need assistance. These include, but are not limited to, the Barn Team to care for our Miracle Herd, fundraisers, etc... Please contact us if you have a desire to serve in any other areas, or if you have a special talent you would like to share!



LESSON VOLUNTEER JOB DESCRIPTION

At Small Miracles, we consider the safety and well-being of our participants, volunteers, staff and equine herd to be our top priority. Therefore, for the safety and well-being of others:

A Lesson Volunteer must:

- Be physically able to walk and/or jog 30-60 minutes and/or walk on uneven ground.
- Be able to lift your arm shoulder height for up to 45 minutes.
- Be reliable and possess adequate body size, strength, endurance, mobility and communication skills necessary to assist personnel with activities at Small Miracles and in emergency situations.
- Be able to work without supervision.
- **Abide by Small Miracles Policies and Procedures.**
- Provide for your own transportation.
- **Keep track of your service hours and bring form to volunteer coordinator for Signing, if applicable.**
- Attend a volunteer training and orientation session.
- Sign a *Liability Release* and all required paperwork. (Those 14-17 years of age must have a parent co-sign all forms.)
- Notify Small Miracles of any changes in your contact information, medical condition, etc.
- Be respectful of the facility and clean up after yourself. Please place all trash in the trash cans. We do recycle aluminum cans. Please place aluminum cans in the recycle barrel located in the observation area outside the lobby door.
- Possess a positive attitude and willingness to work.
- Be respectful of participants and others around you.
- Be respectful of a participant's tolerance to touching. Hugs and other displays of affection should be left for the participant to initiate.
- Always be aware of safety issues and following the instructor's directions.
- Not be afraid of horses! We have other areas for volunteer assistance that does not involve working with horses. Please just let us know!

Duties of Sidewalker:

- Sidewalker is responsible for the participant's safety and to help maintain the participant's position while following the instructor's directions.
- Three types of support: full thigh guard, hand on pad, or walking along beside participant.
- If your arm becomes tired, notify the instructor. The instructor will give you directions on switching with the other sidewalker when it is safe to do so. Always walk in front of the horse, never behind.
- If you notice any problems with the participant, notify the instructor.

- Assist participant in following direction, but avoid conversation that distracts the participant from the instructor.
- Always stay close to the rider. Do not lag behind and NEVER leave the participant's side for any reason.
- Keep hands out of your pockets!
- Be aware of the position of your arm and be careful not to jab horses with elbow or lean on them while sidewalking.
- Let participants be as independent as possible during games and activities.
- If a participant falls from the horse, stay with them and never try to move them. Wait for directions from the instructor.
- If the instructor calls for an Emergency Dismount, there should be no questions asked and everyone should go into the Emergency Dismount procedure. The sidewalker on the left is normally the "off person" and is responsible for removing the rider from the horse. However, if the rider is falling to the right side, the right sidewalker becomes the "off person". If the rider is using a saddle, the sidewalkers should remove the rider's feet from the stirrups and pull the stirrups forward as soon as he/she hears "dismount". The reins should also be pulled out of the rider's way. The person opposite the "off person" should swing the rider's leg forward and over the horse's withers. The "off person" faces forward with his/her hip toward the horse and with his/her feet staggered. He/she should reach up and hug the student around the waist, trunk or under the arms and pull the rider onto his/her hip and walk away from the horse.

Duties of Leader:

- Only volunteers who have successfully completed horse handling techniques and have been approved by the Executive/Program Director, shall lead the horses.
- Assist participants in grooming, tacking or preparing the horse for class.
- May assist in bringing in and turning out horses and/or feeding. When feeding hay, be sure all bale strings are thrown away and not left in the stall, barn aisle or field. If a horse ingests a string, it could cause them to colic which can be deadly.
- Leaders are responsible for the horse at all times during the lesson; sidewalkers are responsible for the students.
- Never wrap the lead rope or reins around your hand, wrist, neck or any other body part. Hold the lead 6-10" from snap in right hand leaving a droop between you and the horse. Fold the end of the rope in a figure 8 and hold in left hand. Keep both hands on the lead.
- Lead with your shoulder at the horse's eye, do not lag behind or try to drag the horse. Ask the horse to walk with you by saying "walk" as you lean forward to take your first stop. If they don't start, try it again. Do not turn and look at them or they will stop. Never walk in front of a horse and try to pull them.
- Keep at least two horse lengths between your horse and the horse in front of you. Do not lead a horse closely behind another horse at any time. There is always the potential for a kick.
- If a rider falls from the horse, remain calm. Move the horse out of the way of the fallen rider. If you are in a group lesson and another rider falls, stop your horse immediately and await instructions.
- If the instructor calls for an Emergency Dismount, there should be no questions asked and everyone should go into the Emergency Dismount procedure. The

leader will halt the horse immediately. While the sidewalker is dismounting a rider, the leader will turn the horse's head toward that sidewalker causing the horse's hips to swing away from the student. After the rider is safely removed, the horse should be moved away.

- If a horse has been identified as being "loose", the front gate must be closed as well as any other gate that may contain the horse. Walk, never run, the horse down, approaching from the side walking towards his shoulder, look him in the eye and speak quietly. Make sure you have a halter and lead rope if the horse not wearing one already.
- Leaders may be asked to assist with grooming, tacking, etc.
- Be alert to horse's behavior/attitude and alert instructor if necessary.
- If you do not feel comfortable leading a particular horse, tell the instructor when assignments are made.

SMALL MIRACLES VOLUNTEER POLICIES

SAFETY

It is our top priority to provide a safe environment at Small Miracles for all of those involved in the program. Working with horses is a high risk activity and policies have been developed to minimize the risk. Safety at Small Miracles is everyone's responsibility. If you see anyone doing something that you feel is not safe, please inform the instructor in charge or a staff person immediately.

ATTENDANCE

It is very important to attend your assigned class time. To ensure the safety of the participants, a pre-determined number of volunteers are needed for each class and each volunteer is counted on to be there during that time in order for the class to be carried out. There have been instances where a participant has been unable to ride during their lesson time due to a volunteer not showing up. If you are unable to attend your scheduled lesson, please contact us as soon as possible so a replacement may be found and the lesson can continue without interruption. If you need to cancel at the last minute or are running late for your lesson, please call the office 423-349-1111.

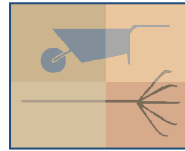
Please plan to arrive at least 15 minutes before your first class is scheduled to begin. If you arrive and a class is underway, wait for the Instructor to give you direction. Please be prompt, if you are running late, call the barn to let the instructor know.

ATTIRE

Volunteers must wear comfortable, sensible clothes that can get dirty. Wear sturdy boots/shoes that you can comfortably jog and work in. Do NOT wear sandals, crocs, clog type shoes, short shorts, crop tops, spaghetti strap tops, dangling jewelry, or pants that drag the ground. It is easy to lose jewelry at the barn and nearly impossible to find, so please leave anything that you value at home. Weather can change quickly so be prepared for all ranges of temperatures – keep a pair of gloves with you during late fall, winter, and early spring. Make sure all jackets, sweatshirts, shirts, etc., are buttoned, zippered or snapped to keep from flapping in the wind, which may spook the horses. Avoid wearing perfumes and/or colognes, as it can attract stinging insects and many of our participants have allergies. Bring a water bottle to prevent dehydration.

BARN TEAM LIST

If you have idle time between classes, please check the barn list of duties that is located on the dry erase board outside the Feed Room. Tasks such as dusting, sweeping, tack cleaning, etc. are always appreciated!



BEHAVIOR

As a representative of Small Miracles, **volunteers must display appropriate behavior at all times**. This includes around the facility or at special functions. For the safety of all involved, there is to be no horseplay, running, shouting, or loud noises around the facility, especially in lesson areas. Volunteers are expected to treat participants, horses, staff and other volunteers and visitors with respect and courtesy. Crude language, inappropriate behavior, and the use of drugs, tobacco or alcohol is strictly prohibited and are grounds for immediate dismissal.

CELL PHONES

Please leave your cell phone in your vehicle or turn it off while you are volunteering. Ringing phones and texting distract the participants and prevent you from focusing on the lesson.

CLASS CANCELLATIONS

As soon as the decision has been made to cancel classes for any reason (weather, etc.), we will put a message on the answering machine greeting. We will make all attempts to contact you, however, sometimes a volunteer may be out of reach for the day and cannot be contacted. If this ever happens to you, we apologize in advance. Whatever the weather is at your home, it may be different at Small Miracles, so call the barn at (423) 349-1111 to confirm if your class has been cancelled before leaving. If there are hazardous conditions where you live, please do not attempt to come to the barn, however we do ask that you contact us to let us know you will not be coming. Typically, Small Miracles will be closed when the Sullivan County School System is closed, however this is not always the case. If you are in doubt, please call!

CONFLICTS

Conflicts with other volunteers and/or staff should be brought to the attention of the **Executive/Program Director**. The Executive/Program Director will mediate between the concerned parties and will make every attempt to resolve issues in a timely and fair manner.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Small Miracles has a policy in place to protect the **confidentiality** of our participants. Names, specific conditions or other personal details are to be held in confidence. By all means, share the stories, the successes, and the warmth – just leave out the private information!

CONTACT INFORMATION

Please keep us informed of any changes in your contact information, i.e., address, phone number, e-mail.

DISMISSAL

Volunteers violating Small Miracles' policies will be subject to a verbal or written reprimand or sent home until further notice in accordance with the nature and severity of the offense. This includes, but is not limited to inappropriate and/or abusive behavior toward people or animals, failure to follow established safety procedures, incidents due to the use of tobacco, drugs or alcohol, refusal to follow directions or complete assigned tasks, rough-housing, theft, inappropriate use of facilities, mailing lists or monies, or the inability to get along with others. Sexual discrimination and/or harassment is grounds for immediate dismissal.

If a volunteer becomes unreliable, loses their strength, mobility, endurance or communication skills necessary to assist participants during lesson activities and in emergency situation, they may be released from the lesson duties. **Small Miracles reserves the right to conduct background checks on all personnel and volunteers.**

FUNDRAISING/LOGO

The Executive Director must approve all fundraising activities and the use of Small Miracles' logo.

INJURIES AND OCCURRENCES

Please inform the instructor or a staff member of any injuries or occurrences (human or horse) no matter how small. Some examples include being nipped by a horse, a participant displaying rough behavior, and behavioral issues with horse or participant. Your communication will help us address these issues. Please be discreet in reporting so as not to alarm the participants.

PARKING

Please do not park in the designated handicapped spots unless you have a permit. The speed limit on the driveway and in the parking area is **5 MPH**. Driving around the building is prohibited.

PET POLICY

Due to legal liabilities, no pets are allowed at Small Miracles. For the safety of your pet, please do not bring them and leave them in your vehicle. It is best to leave your pet at home.

SIGNING IN/OUT

All volunteers are to sign in and out each time they volunteer at Small Miracles. The sign in sheet is on the clipboard hanging on the fence behind the benches next to the mounting area. This sheet is to ensure that all persons are accounted for in case of an emergency as well as tracking service hours.

SMOKING

Small Miracles is a tobacco-free facility, therefore tobacco products of any kind are not allowed anywhere in or near the buildings.

VISITORS

Guests or children of volunteers are permitted, however they are expected to follow all safety and courtesy rules. Children must be directly supervised at all times. Small Miracles is not responsible for their safety and does not provide childcare services. Friends of volunteers **cannot** participate in classes or help out with barn duties until they have been authorized to do so and have all forms completed. Visitors are encouraged to come out and see the program!

WEAPONS AND FIREARMS

No weapons or firearms of any kind are permitted on the property.



GUIDELINES FOR WORKING WITH HORSES

Horses are wonderful creatures and must be worked with in a consistent manner. To keep our environment safe for humans and horses, everyone handling horses must follow these guidelines.

GENERAL

Prevention is the best way to avoid accidents. Be aware of your environment and the horse's attitude. If the horse seems unusually distressed, irritated or sensitive, notify the instructor.

Please do not hand-feed the horses. All treats must be fed from the feed buckets and only with the instructor's permission.

Do not handle a horse without permission and direction from a staff member.

Special grooming procedures (especially those that involve scissors or clippers) are not to be done without permission of an instructor.

Never discipline a horse while a rider is mounted.

APPROACHING A HORSE

When approaching a horse, speak in a low voice and walk slowly toward the shoulder. Never approach from directly behind or from the front as they may not see you and startle. Keep a hand on the horse's body and stay close to him when walking around the horse. Never run, make sudden movements, shout or scream around horses.

EQUIPMENT AND TACKING

Always check the tack for safety before tacking the horse. Never leave a saddle on the horse without a girth. Make sure the reins are not hanging on the ground for the horse to step on.

Please return all tack to its proper place so it can be found the next day!

Halters

Halters are to fit fairly loosely and each has been sized for the horse that wears it. Be sure you have the correct halter before placing it on the horse. When putting a halter on the horse, stand on the horse's left side, place the lead rope over the neck (do not allow it to lie on the ground) and then put the halter on.

Girthing

Girthing a horse too quickly/harshly will cause them to try to avoid this activity (for good reason)! They may end up trying to bite. Always girth slowly, just one hole at a time to allow

them to adjust. It is not necessary to pull and tug. Walk the horse down the barn aisle and then tighten the girth before going into the mounting area. The **Instructor** is responsible for the final girth check and tightening.

GROOMING

When grooming the horse, never kneel down on the ground when grooming the legs. Maintain a quick escape position in case the horse moves. Be very gentle around the horses' flanks (area where hind leg joins the body). Some horses can be ticklish in that spot. Make sure the horse is standing square before attempting to pick up their hoof. You may need to walk them forward or back one stop to achieve this. Keep the hoof pick in your hand next to the horse and pick up the foot with the other hand while slide your hand down the side of the leg and say "pick up" or "up" while gently lifting up the hoof. This will enable you to gently lean into them to distribute their weight onto the other three feet. Stretch the hind leg straight back and place on your bent knee for stability and safety. Always pick away from yourself. Start with the left front hoof, then move to the left rear, right front and right rear. Check for injuries, thrush, cracks, etc. Use a soft bristled brush to groom the horse's face and a damp cloth to wipe the eyes. Check for any abnormalities with the horse and report them immediately to a Small Miracles' staff person.

TURN OUT/BRING IN

Read the turn out schedule to see where each horse goes. All horses must be led with a halter and lead rope to the gate at a walk. Close the gate behind you and turn the horse to face the gate before releasing them. No horse is to be turned out in the field with a halter on. Return all halters to the hook by the appropriate stall.

Never take feed or treats into the field with the herd of horses!

When bringing horses in, always bring in the horse that is closest to the gate first. Do not lead a horse through a group of horses, especially at the gate. Always open the gate inward versus outward. Keep an eye on the loose horses and never turn your back to the herd while you are inside the gate. The horses have their own pecking order and you do not want to bring a lower ranked horse by higher ranked loose horses. Always lead horses in with a halter and lead rope and walk to their stalls.

EMERGENCY ACTION PLAN AND PROCEDURES

INFORMATION

Telephones are located by the front door in the Observation Area, in the Office Area and in the Feed and Tack Rooms. Emergency numbers and directions to the facility are located by each phone. The number to dial for all emergencies is 9-1-1.

When an emergency occurs, remain calm. Survey the scene. Call Emergency Medical Services whenever the situation is more than you can safely handle. If any doubt exists as to whether the situation is an emergency, notify the EMS system.

HUMAN RELATED

Human first aid supplies are located in the plastic tub in the Utility Room in the Observation Area. All injuries, especially those needing first aid treatments, need to be reported to the

instructor or staff person. Completed Emergency Medical Treatment Release forms for both volunteers and participants are located in the office. If an accident occurs during lessons, all activities STOP until the instructor gives further instructions. Volunteers are to stay with their own student and/or horse. NO ONE (including parents) is permitted in the arena if an accident occurs. Only those summoned by the instructor may enter.

HORSE RELATED

Horse first aid items are located in the Feed Room in the locked cabinet. Use only when directed by the instructor or staff person.

EMERGENCY EVACUATION

Immediately evacuate the building via the shortest and safest route. Everyone will assemble at the Emergency meeting area which is located on the southwest (left as you are leaving the building) corner of the parking lot beside the red posts.

If you notice smoke, use an alternative escape route. Test doors with the back of your hand before opening them. If the door is warm or if you notice smoke use an alternative escape route. Check paths for safety before proceeding and close doors behind you. Crawl low if you have to go through smoke.

Do not re-enter the building until deemed safe by emergency personnel.

The Staff member in charge will do a final sweep of the facility, checking the office area, bathrooms, observation area, utility room, stalls, tack and feed rooms and picking up the Volunteer and Guest Sign in notebooks located on the desk in the observation area. Staff member in charge will conduct a roll once assembled outside. 9-1-1 will be called after evacuation has taken place. **Do not leave the facility until told to do so.**

Fire extinguishers are located in the Mounting area, in the back of the arena, in the crossties area, in the back of the barn aisle and the Office area. Only when a fire is small and your own escape route clear should you attempt to extinguish a flame. Aim the extinguisher at the base of the flame and sweep across it. Clothing engulfed in flames must be extinguished by “drop and roll”. Do not let the victim run rather drop to the ground and roll. Water or woolen blankets should be used to extinguish flames.

In the event of an Electrical fire, turn power off at the breaker box located in the mounting area. The main breaker is located at the top of the panel. If this is inaccessible, use the disconnect switch located at the back of the indoor arena by pulling to the down position. Never use water to put out an electrical fire.

Student Evacuation: The instructor will oversee the dismounting of all students and ask side walkers to escort students out to the emergency meeting area. Parents and all other observers will evacuate at this time and meet at the emergency meeting area.

Horse Evacuation: After all persons are evacuated, horses will be abandoned in the arena if it is unsafe to evacuate them. Remove the horses only if able to do so without risking injury to self or others. Horses will be taken to the pasture one at a time with a halter and lead rope. This will be at the discretion of the staff member in charge.

TORNADO

Go into a bathroom, closet, or interior room with no windows. If there is not time to get inside, stay in the open and lie flat in a ditch or low lying area. Protect your head with your hands. Watch for fallen power lines.

FLOODS AND FLASH FLOODS

Leave low lying areas immediately. Do not handle electrical equipment in wet areas.

HAZARDOUS MATERIAL INCIDENTS

Follow instructions of local officials. If you are told to protect breathing, close all windows and doors. Turn off heating and air conditioning systems and fans. Place a damp cloth over your nose and mouth.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF SMALL MIRACLES

Small Miracles was founded in 1995 by Mary Smith, RN, when she saw a need in the community. She combined her desire to serve, strong faith, and love for horses and started up Small Miracles with one horse and a few riders. It outgrew its borrowed location and moved to another facility. Soon, it became apparent that Small Miracles needed its own home. In 1999, land was purchased and our wonderful facility on 11 acres in with and indoor and outdoor arena was built. Small Miracles continues to grow one small miracle at a time.

Quote from Mary Smith, Small Miracles founder:

“What an adventure! As you join the team, I would like to welcome you with open arms and an open heart. May God bless you through this mission.”

STAFF CONTACT INFORMATION

Volunteer comments and feedback are welcome. We encourage you to share your ideas, questions and concerns to help us be the best equine assisted activities program possible. We really do take your input seriously. You may reach us by phone (423) 349-1111

Sherri Russell	Executive/Program Director	sherrism13@gmail.com
J.R. Russell	Barn/Equine Manager	jrsmiracles@gmail.com
Linda McBride	Finance Assistant	lindamcbridesm@yahoo.com
Kimberly Ladd	Program Development Coord.	smallmiracles_kim@hotmail.com
Deborah Ferraro	Instructor (seasonal)	
Chloe Cook	Equine Assistant/PATH Instructor-in-Training	
Lilly Forenz	Equine Assistant	
Ethan Roberts	Equine Assistant per diem	
Libby Torok	Equine Assistant/Volunteer Coordinator per diem	

