

## **RideAbility Orientation      {Basic Training}**

**Program philosophy:** RideAbility is family – focused. We are here to serve families who have people w/special needs. We serve clients with learning disabilities, emotional disorders, various kinds of mental retardation, autism spectrum, spina bifida, downs syndrome, seizure disorders and any other type of disability or special need. We involve the families in any way possible – commonly, siblings ride in class and parents sidewalk. A priority in our training is: ***always treat the families kindly***, remember they are in situations we can't even imagine – give them some grace! We want RideAbility to be a place where joyful memories are created for families and where they are treated with respect. Also, many of our families have been with RideAbility for many years, and they have invested a lot of volunteer time themselves! We want RideAbility to be friendly, accommodating and fun. The therapy happens so easily in a positive environment; in our family-focused setting, we see families “take home” RideAbility successes – and positively affect their family dynamic. RideAbility volunteers are also treated kindly and appreciatively. Volunteers are the life-blood of this program. There are no paid staff or employees (although there are a few jobs that have reimbursed expenses or allow for contract/service charges). Our director is 100% volunteer, our therapists volunteer at no charge, and our horse owners are not compensated either. We are very volunteer intensive, we would like to think we are “leading-edge” in running a non-profit with 100% volunteer staff. \*We continue to improve our administration and overall organizational strategies each year. RideAbility mission statement: Serving families of children and adults with special needs; providing horses and related activities. We create an environment of fun and therapy where everyone is able! (enhancing physical, emotional, spiritual and mental health)

**Program history:** In 1994, Ellen Newman and Mary Lubahn were neighbors & were both expecting babies. When Mary discovered her baby would be a girl with spina bifida - probably confining her to a wheelchair for life - she was sad that she wouldn't be able to share her horses with her daughter. Ellen encouraged Mary and they researched therapeutic riding. Within a couple of years they had enough information to convince the little girl's physical therapist (Lynne McCutcheon) to help them start a program. So, RideAbility began in 1997, founded by Ellen Newman, Mary Lubahn and Lynne McCutcheon. The first year was financed by a grant from the Minnesota 4-H Foundation and the volunteers were members of the Roscoe Rockets 4H Club. They won a State Fair trip as their Community Pride Project. RideAbility was recognized not only for providing therapeutic recreation for children with disabilities (and their siblings), but also for: (1) emphasizing mental health rewards of interacting with peers (with and without special needs) (2) including parents as active program participants and (3) providing a support network for the parents with common life difficulties. The program grew from 3 riders on a warm night in June 1997 to more than 8 riders with disabilities by the end of the summer. Ellen and Mary worked with Lynne (Physical Therapist) to set-up and run the program for 5 years and finished incorporating it as non-profit, setting up a board of directors, gaining United Way funding and completing processes and forms, etc. The program has been located at Promised Meadows since 1999 when Jeanie&Jim Michelizzi volunteered to host RideAbility.

**Currently:** Jim&Jeanie continue to host RideAbility, please remember this is private property and visitors should remain in or near the polebarn and the playground. Jeanie has volunteered as the Executive Director and Program Director since 2001. Each year our volunteers, board of directors and staff teams work with Jeanie to improve various aspects of the program (everything from fencing and horse care to grant writing and standards documentation). Each year the program has grown in number of clients served (over 100 per year), number of service hours provided, quality of offerings and improvements in processes and physical facility. Constant improvement is accomplished every year ... and we intend to continue to improve every year in the future.

### **Class offerings:**

1) Registered Group lessons – there are 4 sessions per year (Spring, Summer #1, Summer #2, and Fall). The Spring and Fall focus on adults while the large summer sessions focus on clients 4 yrs old through 21 years old and serve the entire family as much as possible. These lessons are the core of the RideAbility program and they run from April through October.

2) Private & Semi-private lessons – lessons can be scheduled one-at-a-time with a PATH Intl. certified instructor. These are limited depending on volunteer and instructor availability, and they can be scheduled year round. The lessons are customized to the student's needs and goals.

3) One-time-fun-time community offering – this type of visit is scheduled with a community group, and is run like an evaluation lesson with a PATH Intl. certified instructor. This type of “lesson” can be extended to 2 or 3 hours at the farm, can include many fun activities (wagon rides, spirit painting, grooming, leading, games, and riding activities) and can be schedule any day of the year depending on weather and volunteer availability. These one-time-fun-time group sessions are a lot of fun for volunteers and clients alike.

**Family-Focus:** We are family centered, inspired by the original idea of providing horse back riding for disabled children & their siblings & their peers. This implementation of inclusion is quite unique for a

therapeutic riding center. RideAbility received an award from Arc SE MN for inclusion in 1999. We also provide events each year for the whole family 1-annual meeting (w/family activity) 2- barn dance fundraiser (w/riding time for kids) 3- student horse show (w/prizes, awards, our students doing the showing) 4- student rideathon fun night. We also encourage families and volunteers to participate in local parades (Pine Island, Zumbrota, Red Wing) and our other fundraisers. Lets have fun! We view our students as our main clients, and our volunteers as secondary clients who also need an enjoyable and therapeutic environment!

**RideAbility Organization:** The RideAbility Board of directors oversees the program vision, legal and financial responsibilities and supports the executive director. The RideAbility Staff Teams accomplish the work with the class schedules, client evaluations, volunteer training, horse care and facility maintenance. Review the org chart and the description of volunteer staff teams.

**Safety:** Safety concerns are behind every rule we have and every guideline we teach. Our program emphasizes safety for everyone, please provide feedback when you see potential safety improvements.

**Suggestions:** Black mailbox with suggestion cards – for safety issues and any other issue/idea you want to comment on. We also use program evaluation forms.

**Funding:** RideAbility runs on a relatively small budget –and on the very big hearts of our many volunteers and supporters! Our program is funded by United Way, Annual Giving letters, RideAbility Annual luncheon, Barn Dance, PonyUp, Pony Rides at the Olmsted Co. Fair, RideATHons and other fundraisers and special grants. We receive class fees plus private and corporate donations.

**Membership:** RideAbility is incorporated as a membership based organization. Paying an annual membership dues supports the program by making the organization credible. Review the membership form in the volunteer folder for more details.

**Spending:** Our funds are used primarily to care for our horses, to update/maintain our facility&equipment, pay liability insurance – and if we are thrifty enough with the money we can provide additional volunteer education (CPR, PATH Intl., instructor clinics, etc.) which drives our growth.

**Forms:** You need to fill out an Application form – giving us your name/address/phone/date of birth and telling us what your specific interests are. Each year you must also sign a Participation form – this form includes all of the industry standard forms on one piece of paper (liability release, confidentiality stmtnt, photo release, medical consent and insurance info). It also has an orientation checklist which you need to “sign-off” on to indicate that you have been given the training information. These 2 forms need to be turned in – they will be filed in our volunteer folder file. Volunteer contact information is kept in an excel spreadsheet by the Director, some phone numbers are in the class log book, and the hardcopy volunteer files are available during classes.

**Liability:** Minnesota equine liability law protects volunteers at a non-profit from being liable for injuries during class. Our attorney told us this law is very effective. We have a copy of the law posted, and you must sign a copy of it on your participation form.

**Insurance:** We have liability insurance that protects all registered volunteers from being sued in case of an accident. This is not medical insurance, you are 100% responsible for your own medical bills and you need your own medical coverage.

**Occurrence Reports:** If anything unexpected/ unsafe happens, we need to fill out an occurrence report. The blank forms are kept in the class log book at the desk, after they are signed they should be reviewed w/the instructor and given to the program director to be stored in the occurrence log book (which is reviewed by the board of directors).

**Respect:** People first philosophy - all students, families and volunteers should be respected. Remember, you are working with a “child with a disability” – rather than a “disabled child” (People First). Also, remember that all volunteers here are... volunteers!! No one is getting paid for the effort they are putting in, (except a few contract positions) => RideAbility has no paid staff. It helps to appreciate each other!!

**Confidentiality:** You are now an ambassador for RideAbility. Opinions need to stay here: do not say something about someone else, it could be overheard and misinterpreted. Also, HIPPA guidelines require no medical information be shared. Please remember not to repeat a client’s diagnosis or medical details.

**Photo Release:** Photos are used in brochures, newspapers, television, websites, scrapbooks, emails, etc. We have trouble including you in classes if you do not sign a photo release.

**Authorization for Medical Treatment:** It is standard policy in most sports to sign a pre-consent form for medical treatment in case of injury.

**Volunteer Attire:** Bug spray recommended. Please use nametags. Loose clothing can be a problem. Turn off your cell phone! Sturdy shoes are required – **no sandals or open toed shoes are allowed!** Shorts are allowed, as long as you have sturdy shoes.

**Student Attire:** Students must wear long pants to prevent chaffing (please no slippery wind pants). Students should wear sturdy shoes. We always use safety stirrups or no stirrups. We require SEI certified horse back riding helmets. We recommend the students buy their own. We have helmets that can be borrowed. Sidewalkers should help students to find and fit borrowed helmets – from the helmet cabinet.

**First Aid Kit:** Red Cross first aid kit: is mounted on the wall in the arena. In addition to band-aids and the basics: we have blankets, pillows, & CPR mask.

**Fire Extinguishers:** Mounted on the walls near each door (4 doors, and 4 fire extinguishers). These are inspected and recharged on a regular basis.

**Lost and Found:** When someone leaves something behind we put it in our large lost&found box. If it looks extremely valuable (like a purse or cell phone) we try to contact the owner. Approximately once a year the lost and found box is bagged up and the items disposed of.

**Phone:** The phone is available for your use, but there is no long distance service – you can call Rochester, Pine Island, Zumbrota and 1-800 numbers. There is emergency information posted near the phone & above the door (in case of a 911 call). The Pine Island first responders can be here in under 8 minutes.

**Refreshments:** A water jug and cups are provided –and necessary in the heat! We often have soda for sale in the refrigerator. You may want to bring your own bottled water or soda and keep it in the frig. We often have brownies or popsicles – and you are welcome to also volunteer to bring treats!

**Children visiting:** Please stay in the designated area for safety. Be especially careful not to let anyone go down to the barns, or out in the pastures unsupervised. Safety is number one concern! We have a small play area near the outdoor arena.

**Cleaning up:** Please help to keep everything cleaned up. Use the garbage cans located near the doors and aluminum cans go in the barrel marked “CANS”.

**Porta-potty:** The porta-potty is available for everyone – if something is needed there please let the barn manager know! There is hand sanitizer, a garbage can, a broom etc. It is serviced by On-Site Sanitation. We spray it periodically, but there are often bugs – because it is outside, and especially when it is hot! You can help out anytime by sweeping – floors, ceilings and walls. Thanks in advance for your help!

**Absences:** If you have a scheduled absence, please write it down on the small white board –your name and the date you will be gone. If you “tell someone” we might forget ☺ As for unscheduled absences - we understand that people will get sick, or have family emergencies, etc. Please notify the barn as soon as possible so we can re-schedule students and volunteers. We also appreciate those volunteers who come to class as “back-ups” – knowing that they often will not be sidewalking, etc. but they are here to help with miscellaneous things and sidewalking “just-in-case” – thanks a million to those people !

**Bad Weather:** We TRY to cancel 2 hrs before class starts. Please, ***do not come*** if you feel unsafe, and ***leave early*** (stop your team and tell the instructor) if you feel you need to go home. We ride inside if it rains, but many students are easily scared of thunder, etc. We will announce any make-up dates. Our weather shelter is the basement of Jim&Jeanie’s house – and, yes, we have used it in sudden storms.

**Teams:** A team is made up of a student, horse, horse leader and two sidewalkers – and names are posted on the board. We like to keep the same team together from week to week – so you can see your student progress and you can work with your student to help challenge and teach them! Of course, there are many times that teams have to be changed due to personal schedules, etc. so plan on being flexible ☺ As soon as you get here – sign in on the volunteer log book, put your personal things in the bin, turn off your cell phone, put on a name tag, find your student, and the rest of your team. Find out which horse you will be with. Listen for the instructor to call your team for mounting, but in the meantime work with student before entering the ring – get their helmet on, work with the student at the saddle stands. Help students do exercises on saddle stands. Ask the PT for suggestions, be proactive for your student! Your team really makes the experience great for your student: be sensitive, and enjoy!

**Curriculum&Class Time :** We have a basic 5 week curriculum: 1-Evaluation 2-Safety 3-Communication 4-Balance 5-Fun&Games. It makes it easier for all of us when there is a clear emphasis each week. Class time has the same basic format each week: 1-prayer for safety, 2-mounting 3-warm-ups 4-horsemanship and education 5-games 6-cool-down 7-dismounting. “After-class” meetings are encouraged – if volunteers can

stay for the extra few minutes it is very productive to record student progress and help the instructor to change lesson plans as needed.

**Certified Instructors:** Jeanie is our head instructor and has been certified by HSA&PATH Intl. Katie Livingood is PATH Intl. certified and we have other instructors who are working toward PATH Intl. certification. PATH Intl. has set the industry standards for therapeutic riding for over 40 yrs.

**Medical Professionals:** PT/OT or PATH Intl. certified instructor evaluates each student at the first lesson. PT/OT defines the best procedures at the mounting ramp, reviews medical history with parents, suggests goals, etc. We try to have a PT/OT involved in every class session, and we achieve close to 100% coverage! But, as you can imagine - medical professional volunteers are needed!!

**Mounting/Dismounting:** DEMO: We use experienced people at the mounting ramp. Students can use the steps or the wheelchair ramp. The horse is brought up to the ramp, then a Safety Check is done: cinch is tight, tack is snug and fits well, horse is calm. Then the student is mounted onto the horse according to the recommendations provided by the PT. Dismounting is safest if we go directly to the ground (not near the ramp or any other “hard objects”). There are times that we use the ramp to dismount - when our experienced people feel it is in the best interest of the student or the volunteers. Emergency dismount is described very well in the training manual. DEMO: One sidewalker “pulls” the student off the horse.

**Side walker training:** DEMO: We teach 3 basic holds – 1- Full hold with back support 2- Full hold (one hand on ankle or lower leg, the other arm braced across the thigh) 3- Ankle hold (one hand on ankle, other hand free) Learn about your student using the student info cards in the card box on the desk, question parents and instructors, and talk to your student. Ask the PT for ideas on how to best work with the student. Be sure to provide feedback to program (add notes to their student info card) on what works well with your student. Also, learn about the horse you are working with. Requirements: one-hour orientation is required, but more time is better! Safety notes: your feet are your responsibility, the horse cannot see your feet, do not get stepped on! Trotting requires more practice and training (do not let the student bounce much, talk to the horse leader to assure them all is ok).

**Horse handling:** Horses are tied in the arena. Volunteers are only allowed in the arena when they are assigned to help with a horse, or when their assigned student is in class. Students are only allowed in the arena when they are ready to mount. “Horse” volunteers spend extra time training (working with the horses). We have procedures for catching, grooming, saddling, leading, feeding and watering horses, cooling and unsaddling horses – to keep the horses calm, happy and healthy. There is a lot to learn and a lot to practice. These horses do not require professional horse trainers but they do require a caring, gentle hand – and a lot of patience! We are continuously working to improve horse training. The horse evaluation team defines and is in charge of our training curriculum to get more horse-volunteers “trained-in”. ☺ Come out on Thursday evenings for horse exercise if you want more practice with the horses.

**Volunteer Training manuals and Volunteer folders:** Read your training manual – it covers horse-basics and disability-basics. Look through your folders, use them, keep your RideAbility papers there.

**Orientation presentation review:** We talked about the program history/philosophy, how our program runs, what volunteers do, the physical layout of the facility, how our teams and classes operate and Demonstrations of mounting/dismounting and sidewalking. Time for practicing at the mounting ramp, and practicing side walking is provided.

**Emergency Dismount:** Please ask to try an emergency dismount. The more volunteers we have who are comfortable “pulling-off” a student, the safer our program is!

**Volunteer Schedule:** Before you leave the barn on training night, please sign your name, phone number and what schedule you would like to volunteer for. THANK YOU!

**Volunteer Training Checklist:** Complete the volunteer training checklist , sign and hand in.

*\*After completing this one hour mandatory training you are a RideAbility Rookie level volunteer. The remainder of your training at RideAbility will depend largely on your interest, your availability, and your comfort level with the information and volunteer work you will do. Thank you for sharing your time and your talents!*