

NDSU

Bison Strides

**Experience the Therapeutic
Power of the Horse**



Volunteer Handbook

Welcome to NDSU Bison Strides! First THANK YOU for committing your time to this training that will enable us to provide safe, engaging equine assisted services (EAS) of exceptional quality to individuals with physical, cognitive, emotional, behavioral and (or) mental health disabilities, diagnoses or challenges living in Fargo-Moorhead and surrounding communities. Bison Strides embodies the mission of NDSU as a student-focused, land-grant, research university. Operating under the Department of Animal Sciences, students engage in experiential teaching, learning and service opportunities; participants experience physical, cognitive and emotional growth; and researchers have the capability to investigate the efficacy of horse and human interactions. Because of the horse, amazing transformations take place. Improved balance and gait symmetry, greater social functioning and language development, and increased confidence and self-esteem are all documented outcomes of partnering horses and humans. By volunteering with Bison Strides you help create opportunities for people to experience the therapeutic power of the horse.

Volunteer training will include:

- 1. Paperwork completion**
- 2. People first language**
- 3. Bison Strides Programs**
- 4. Confidentiality**
- 5. EAS definitions and benefits of EAS**
- 6. Rules and regulations of the NDSU Equine Center and Bison Strides**
- 7. Attire**
- 8. Role and responsibilities of volunteers**
- 9. Horse behavior**
- 10. Emergency procedures**
- 11. Sidewalking practice**

Questions can be directed to Erika Berg at 231-9611 or ndsu.bisonstrides@ndsu.edu

Background

NDSU offers a minor in Equine Assisted Activities and Therapies within the Department of Animal Sciences, is a Higher Education Member of the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International (PATH Intl.; www.pathintl.org) and the only PATH Intl. Premier Accredited Center in ND. PATH Intl. is an international accrediting organization for centers offering EAS and also provides education for EAS professionals throughout the world. NDSU students completing the minor must possess novice horsemanship skills and have the opportunity to work towards earning their Certified Therapeutic Riding Instructor (CTRI) credential as well as explore certification opportunities as an Equine Specialist in equine assisted learning or mental health work through various organizations.

Programs

Bison Strides offers four programs:

1. Adapted horsemanship
2. Equine assisted learning
3. Veterans and military horsemanship
4. Physical and occupational therapy services incorporating equine movement (hippotherapy) in partnership with Beyond Boundaries Therapy Services

People First Language

Remember that all of us have strengths and all of us have things we need help doing. Focusing on what individuals CAN do is much more powerful than focusing on what they can't do. Expect great things from yourself and from everyone around you and you will often be surprised.

People First Language means that we see the person first – not their diagnosis. For example, Emily is a woman who uses a wheelchair, not a wheelchair bound person. Johnathon is a boy with autism, not an autistic child. Recognizing that people are not defined by their diagnosis is important because while their diagnosis may be part of who they are, it is not all of who they are. Emily is also an artist who works at the bank and drives herself there every day. Johnathon also is exceptional at math, enjoys swimming and loves dogs.

Confidentiality

Bison Strides has strict confidentiality guidelines regarding the right to privacy for all individuals involved with the program. This policy extends not only to program participants and their diagnosis/special needs and any sensitive information, but also extends to protect the privacy of others involved with the program including volunteers and staff. It is extremely important that volunteers and staff respect the individual circumstances of those involved with the program. Please do not take the issues of our participants or personal information regarding other individuals beyond the facility.

Breach of this confidentiality policy may result in reprimand, loss of certain job/volunteer responsibilities, or termination of services/employment.

EAS Definitions from the PATH Intl. Standards for Certification and Accreditation Manual, 2021

Equine-Assisted Activities (EAA) – any specific center activity, e.g., mounted, driving, vaulting or ground activities, grooming and stable management, shows, parades, demonstrations, etc., in which the center’s clients, participants, volunteers, instructors and equines are involved.

Equine-Assisted Therapy (EAT) – therapy or treatment that incorporates equine activities and/or the equine environment. Rehabilitative goals are related to the client’s needs and the medical professional’s standards of practice.

Equine-Assisted Learning (EAL) – Equine-assisted learning (EAL) is an experiential learning approach that promotes the development of life skills applicable to educational, professional or personal goals through equine-assisted activities.

Equine-Facilitated Mental Health (EFMH) – an approach to improving a client’s mental health that involves the use of equines in interactive therapies and activities

Equine-Facilitated/Assisted Psychotherapy (EFP/EAP) – an interactive process in which a licensed mental health professional working with or as an appropriately credentialed equine professional partners with suitable equine(s) to address psychotherapy goals set forth by the mental health professional and the client

Hippotherapy (HPOT) – a physical, occupational or speech therapy treatment strategy that utilizes equine movement. This strategy is used as part of an integrated treatment program to achieve functional outcomes.

Hippotherapy Clinical Specialist (HPCS) – a licensed therapist (PT, OT, SLP) who has demonstrated an advanced level of knowledge in hippotherapy by successfully completing a national board-written examination

Hippotherapy Team Members – those involved in the provision of hippotherapy services. Prior to the hippotherapy session, the team will be the PATH Intl. Certified Instructor and the therapist (if the therapist is not a PATH Intl. Certified Instructor). During the hippotherapy session the hippotherapy team is most often the therapist, the equine handler, the sidewalkers—all those involved with providing services to the participant. In decision making, the participant is often thought of as part of the hippotherapy team.

Horse Handler, Horse Expert, Horse Leader, Equine Handler, Equine Expert, Equine Leader, Equine Professional – terms which may be used to indicate the person responsible for controlling the equine during a session and/or training and conditioning the equine for participation in equine-assisted activities. Usage may vary by discipline. The HPOT session where an equine is long-lined might have an equine handler; whereas, the person leading the equine in a therapeutic riding lesson may be the equine leader.

Sidewalkers – individuals who walk next to riders offering physical and/or emotional support during mounted horsemanship lessons.

Rules and Regulations of the NDSU Equine Center

1. Respect the rights and property of others using the facility.
2. No smoking or tobacco products allowed inside the NDSU Equine Center building or grounds.
3. No alcoholic beverages or illegal substances are allowed on the premises of the NDSU Equine Center building or grounds.
4. No individual under the influence of drugs or alcohol is allowed on the NDSU Equine Center building or grounds.
5. No firearms or ammunitions are allowed on the NDSU Equine Center building or grounds.
6. Please leave your mobile phones in your vehicle or at the volunteer table.
7. For health and safety reasons, no outside dogs are allowed.
8. The barn office is off limits without authorization or if you need to make an emergency call.
9. Park only in the designated area(s) at the Equine Center. Do not park on the grass, block entrances to the building or turnout pens, or block manure bunkers or machinery.
10. Please help keep the Equine Center clean by throwing any garbage in the appropriate containers – even if it isn't yours.
11. Please keep gates closed at all times.
12. No one is allowed in horse stalls or pens without permission and accompaniment from NDSU staff. Please stay within designated areas.
13. The Bison Strides Program Director, NDSU staff and student instructors reserve the right to ask anyone posing a safety threat to leave the premises

Attire

1. We will be in the indoor arena but plan to dress in layers for the weather.
2. Close-toed and close-heeled shoes are mandatory. Boots are preferred but tennis shoes are acceptable.
3. Profanity on clothing or other apparel items is not acceptable.
4. Shirts must cover the torso.
5. Long pants are preferred but you may wear shorts.
6. Long, dangly earrings or jewelry should be removed for your safety.
7. Please don't wear cologne or perfume. Many of our participants have sensory reactions to strong smells
8. Long hair should be tied back in a ponytail

Roles and Responsibilities of Volunteers Volunteer attendance is vital for program success – we THANK YOU! Without you, participants are not able to ride so please be sure to allow 24 hour notice if you are unable to attend your regularly scheduled volunteer time so we are able to find another volunteer to take your place. Call 231-9611, check our Facebook page or e-mail ndsu.bisonstrides@ndsu.edu. Lessons will not be canceled unless there is a current, severe weather emergency.

1. Sign-in in the Volunteer Book
2. If arriving prior to classes, help with arena and facility set-up
3. Greet riders as they arrive and assist with helmets as needed
4. Engage with riders and have fun!
5. Sidewalkers are responsible for supporting riders, helping to maintain safety and facilitating communication between instructor and participant
6. Walking and occasionally jogging on uneven terrain while holding onto a rider with one or both hands for up to an hour is required
7. Sweep alleyways, scoop and dump manure buckets, and clear arena after lessons
8. Check out in the Volunteer Book

Emergency Procedures

1. Landline emergency phone is located in the NDSU Equine Office with emergency info on the wall
2. Man-made or natural disasters
 - a. Fire
 - i. Exit the east end of the building and meet at the main driveway entrance on the grass across from (west of) the first red pen.
 - b. Tornado
 - i. Shelter in the bathrooms on the east end of the building
 - c. Flood
 - i. NDSU is an emergency flood location. Local law enforcement will be contacted for the safest routes.
3. Horse or rider emergencies: **All horses should halt**
 - a. Horse spooks
 - i. Everyone halts. The horse handler will control the horse and sidewalkers should maintain a hold on the rider or perform an emergency dismount if needed.
 - b. Rider has a seizure
 - i. Everyone halts. The instructor will inform everyone of the next steps which will likely include dismounting the rider.
 - c. Rider falls off their horse
 - i. Everyone halts. The horse handler of horse whose rider fell will move the horse away from the participant. Sidewalkers will remain with the participant and the instructor will inform everyone of the next steps which include assessing the participant for injuries.
 - d. Occurrence reports
 - i. Any injury or unusual event (even if no injury occurs) must be documented
 - ii. Binder in the NDSU Equine Center office
 - e. Human first aid kit located in the Volunteer stall

Horse Behavior

Horses are prey animals and humans are predators. This means that humans evolved to be hunters and gatherers, chasing down prey. Horses are designed to avoid predators. The horses used in the Bison Strides program have been selected for their temperament and experience, and have also been trained to the unique needs of our participants. Some key information about horses is that they are very tuned in to their surroundings, engaging all their senses. If something frightens them, their first instinct is to run and the second is to fight. Again, the horses in the Bison Strides program have been trained specifically for this work and have a great deal of trust in their handlers, but it is important we remember and respect the horse's natural instincts.

Sight A horse's ability to see is its most important sense. The position of the horse's eyes enable them to see nearly 360 degrees around their body so they are able to see a predator approaching from many angles.

Hearing A horse's ears are unique in that they are able to rotate and this gives you an excellent idea of where their attention is focused, as well as the mood they are in. A horse also has excellent hearing.

Touch The horse is extremely sensitive to touch and can feel a fly land on their skin. They have been trained to accept different aids or cues and ignore others.

Moving safely around horses We will demonstrate how to safely move around horses in volunteer training. When you approach any horse, it is a good idea to say 'hey there' or their name or some sound that lets them know you are there. Once they are aware of your presence (you can see their eye, they turn their head or ear to acknowledge you), approaching the shoulder is the best place. Horses generally prefer to have their necks scratched or gently stroked rather than patted firmly. We ask that you do not pet their faces.

To walk behind a horse, you either walk very close with a hand on their croup (part of their back towards their tail) so they know you are there or at least 10 feet behind them so if they do kick out, you are out of the way. Again, it is highly unlikely they will kick if they know you are there and do not feel threatened.

Sidewalker Holds

The instructor will tell you what type of hold your rider needs. If you have questions at any time, please ask. Also, if your arm gets tired, ask the leader to bring the horse to the center of the arena where you can switch sides.

1. Over the thigh/knee plus ankle or heel hold
2. Over the thigh/knee only
3. Ankle hold
4. Heel hold
5. Spotting (walking next to the rider, but not holding on)

Sidewalker Tips for Working with Participants

Below are some examples of common situations that may arise during lessons, as well as some ideas for appropriate responses. Be mindful of asking a question or offering a choice if there isn't one. Patience and positivity are so important! At any time if you have a question about something, please ask 😊

1. A rider is easily distracted and not focusing on the lesson:
 - a. Redirect the participant
 - i. "Let's listen to (instructor) and see what we are doing next!"
 - ii. "Right now we are riding so let's listen so you know what to do next."
 - iii. "Let's pay attention so you can tell (horse) where to go."
 - b. Compliment the rider on something they *are* doing well
 - i. "(Horse) listens so well when you _____."
 - ii. "Wow! I really like how you are sitting up so straight and tall!"
 - iii. "You are doing a great job holding your reins properly!"
2. A rider wants to dismount early, asks how much time is left or is bored
 - a. Help keep them in the moment
 - i. "Right now we are riding. You will be done in ___ minutes or ___ more times around the arena."
 - ii. "Let's listen – it sounds like there is a fun activity coming up!" But be sure there actually IS a fun activity coming up 😊
 - iii. "Tell me about your favorite thing to do while riding."
3. A rider refuses to participate in an activity or warm-up. Your response will differ depending on the reason.
 - a. Be sure the participant heard the instructor
 - i. "(Name) did you hear (instructor)? She said _____."
 - b. They are nervous or scared
 - i. "Let's try just one hand – I will help you."
 - c. They just don't feel like it. Depending on the participant, you can just let it go or if unsure, ask the instructor.
 - i. "Once this warm-up is done then you will be able to _____."
 - ii. "It's important to warm-up our muscles because it will help us ride better / communicate with our horses better."
4. A rider uses inappropriate language
 - a. This really depends on the participant. If we are working with a combat veteran or adult with brain injury or stroke for example, it's typically not even addressed (with the exception of "it sounds like you are frustrated" because we would not have any kiddos at the same time.
 - b. With youth using inappropriate language, the best response is usually no response as it may be attention seeking so redirecting is a good idea
 - i. "It sounds like it's time to _____."
 - ii. "I wonder what we are doing next?"
 - iii. "(Horse) doesn't like those words."

50 Ways to Say “Good Job!”

1. Good Work!
2. You are very good at that.
3. TREMENDOUS!
4. Good thinking!
5. That’s the way!
6. I knew you could do it.
7. I like that.
8. Keep up the good work.
9. GREAT!
10. You make it look easy.
11. I’m very proud of you.
12. I think you’ve got it now.
13. Nothing can stop you now.
14. EXCELLENT!
15. That’s the best ever.
16. Nice going!
17. SENSATIONAL!
18. You’re right.
19. CLEVER!
20. That’s great!
21. FINE!
22. WONDERFUL!
23. Nice Going.
24. Now that’s what I call a fine job!
25. That’s my boy/girl!
26. AWESOME!
27. Terrific!
28. You’re doing beautifully!
29. Right on!
30. That’s it!
31. You certainly did well today.
32. You are really learning a lot!
33. You outdid yourself today.
34. You’re doing great!
35. Good for you!
36. Way to go.
37. That’s RIGHT!
38. Good going.
39. That’s GOOD!
40. OUTSTANDING!
41. FANTASTIC!
42. KEEP IT UP!
43. That’s it!
44. Congratulations!
45. Good for you!
46. DYNAMITE!
47. Nice work!
48. Very good, (name of participant)
49. SUPERB!
50. MARVELOUS

