



## Volunteer Manual

2025

### History of EquiCenter

Welcome! EquiCenter, Inc. began in 2004 at a smaller location down the road on 251 with a few horses and riders. Within a handful of years the program grew and needed to find a new location. This 200 acre privately owned property and the owners were looking to sell with their goal of keeping it a forever horse farm. EquiCenter moved to this location in 2012 after receiving a 1.5 million dollar donation from William and Mildred Levine.

### Intro Information about EquiCenter

EquiCenter's mission is to foster growth, wellness, and educational opportunities for people of all ages and abilities through the power of equestrian, horticultural, and outdoor experiences.

**EquiCenter is a not for profit 501(c)(3) organization.** Monies collected through our programs offset about 28% of our overall operating cost. Fundraisers and Grant writing are a big part of our organization. We are always looking for support by working on committees, special projects or volunteering the day of the events.

On the equine side, EquiCenter is a premier accredited member of the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International (PATH). All of our instructors are CTRI (Certified Therapeutic Riding Instructors), or "PATH certified." We also mentor qualified candidates in gaining their PATH certification. It's a long and intense process, involving studying, hands-on work, instruction, and more. We also support work toward the ESMHL ( Equine Specialist in Mental Health and Learning) certification.

Programming on the farm is tailored to veterans and participants in our HEAL (Horticultural and Equine Active Learning) programming. Through hands-on planting, maintenance, and harvesting activities, participants in our horticulture programs experience emotional healing, improved cognitive skills and improved balance, coordination, strength and stamina. They are able to hone skills as they help grow thousands of pounds of vegetables, fruits, herbs, and flowers each year, which are used in farm-to-table cooking classes and events and donated to hunger relief efforts throughout the Rochester Area.

Annual events provide a source of connection to the community and raise valuable operating funds. Each year we welcome volunteer assistance with:

- **Paddles for Saddles** A fundraiser held at several local paddle courts one day each spring.
- **EquiCenter Horse Show** An opportunity for our mounted equine students to showcase their skills each spring.
- **Sporting Clays Shooting Tournament** A shooting fundraiser held at a local gun club mid-summer each year.
- **EquiTrails** Horses and riders from the local community tackle obstacles spread across our property each summer or fall.
- **Mane Event** Our biggest annual fundraiser, held in the fall, with many opportunities to contribute.
- **Hoof it for Heros** A 2.2-mile, 22-day Challenge held on or near Veterans Day raising awareness for the 22 veterans who commit suicide each day.

More detailed and scheduling information is available on the EquiCenter web site.

## **Horses**

Our herd consists of more than 35 horses, including a diversity of size, breed, and temperament. This allows EquiCenter to match the right horse with a rider. Our herd includes:

- Miniature Horses (“minis”)

- Small, Medium and Large Ponies
- Small, Medium and Large Horses
- Draft Crosses
- Mustangs (Veteran Programming-Mustang)

All the horses live outside 12 months a year in 8 paddocks with 3 rotating pastures. All paddocks have run in sheds, salt licks, and self-water systems. All South Barn stalls have self-water systems as well. Horses are cared for by our Equine Care Specialist team. Staff is on site 7 days a week to care for our herd, from approximately 7 AM – 8 PM depending on the weather and that day's schedule.

### **What does it take to be a therapy horse?**

Some horses are a free lease to EquiCenter. We take care of their basic needs and in return using the horse to work in our program. Other horses are owned by EquiCenter and their purchases are funded by donations, grants, and fundraising. Once a horse arrives at EquiCenter, it is allowed to settle in for a bit during a trial period before starting the process to see if it has the makings of a therapy horse. The horse must be quiet and willing to stand during the grooming process as well as patient while standing in the mounting area for the mount.

It cannot be aggressive towards other horses when working in semi-private or group lessons.

It must be tolerant of sudden, loud, unpredictable sounds and noises around them while working. This includes the many props that are used during lessons, such as balls, rings, flags, cones and any other props that may be used. Horses also need to be quiet and steady when trail riding or riding away from the barn. Each horse has a rider weight limit and how many hours they can work each week.

### **Who do we serve?**

Our clients comprise approximately 50% each children and adults. All participants have medically diagnosed conditions, are veterans and veteran groups, at-risk youth and their families, school groups, or summer educational programming participants. Some of the medical conditions we can work with are:

- ADD and ADHA
- Autism Spectrum

- Cerebral Palsy
- Developmental Delay
- Down Syndrome
- Epilepsy
- Friedreich's Ataxia
- Hypotonia
- MS
- PTS/TBI
- Stroke/Visual Impairments

**Visit the EquiCenter website** at the Volunteer Tab to learn more about these disabilities and more.

### **Participants and Programming**

We teach 45 weeks and offer 4 Sessions throughout the year with break weeks in between. We are currently serving the needs of 190 people each week and look to fill almost 250 volunteer shifts a week.

We offer:

#### ***Adaptive Riding and Horsemanship Classes- Volunteers Needed***

1 hr – 45 min – 30 min. Private, Semi Private and Group Lessons.

Unmounted Horsemanship Lessons

Leaders

Side Walkers

#### ***HEAL – Horticulture & Equine, Active Learning – Volunteer Needed***

HEAL is a curriculum-based horticulture and equine learning experience that offers 1-day or multi-week programs. HEAL strives to create unique outdoor education and wellness learning opportunities that include fresh air and hands-ons experiences.

#### ***EAL- Equine Assisted Learning – Volunteers Needed***

This is mostly a non-riding program, participants learn individual responsibility, relationship, and communication skills and gain an appreciation for teamwork,

self-discipline and trust. Through their activities, they develop a sense of purpose as they help care for horses who are, in turn, caring for individuals with disabilities and veterans.

Participants learn and improve skills such as:

- Horse Grooming
- Leading
- Horse Handling
- Recognizing horse body language and horse communication
- How to work around horses safely
- Horse Chores
- And so much more!

**HEAL (Horticultural and Equine Active Learning) programming** helps foster confidence and independence for those who participate. Groups who have participated include:

- Norman Howard School
- Rochester City School District – School 45 – School 33
- Hillside Children’s Center
- East High School
- School 33 & 45
- Calkin’s Middle School
- Batavia VA
- Presbyterian Memory Care Unit
- String for Success – RCSD School 19
- And more

### **Social Squad – Volunteers Needed**

Social Squad is a welcoming, social group for young adults 18 years and older of all abilities. We provide themed events offering guided activities to help support meaningful conversations on social interaction, handling differences, friendships, communication, and more. Most events include food and refreshments.

### ***Therapeutic Horticulture*** – No Volunteers Required

Learn the foundation of growing your own food. Programs range from a 6-week foundations course with support for starting a garden at home to specialized horticulture workshops such a growing space design, raised bed/container gardening, food preservation, beekeeping and more.

### ***BEElieve In Heroes*** – No Volunteers Required

EquiCenter's apiary was started as an extension project by one of our veteran participants.

Air Force veteran Luann Van Peursem cares for our 5 bee hives, which pollinate the EC farm, and teaches workshops on the importance of these pollinators to our ecosystem to veterans, school groups, and community members.

### ***Cooking with Heroes*** – No Volunteers Required

Join us for our next Cooking with Heroes Class, taught by Air Force veteran Chef Ellen, This class is open to any veteran. Chef Ellen will engage participants in some fun as they prepare and cook a healthy meal that everyone will enjoy together.

### ***Mission Mustang*** – No Volunteers Required

In 2018, EquiCenter launched *Mission Mustang*® as part of our ongoing effort to help veterans heal from the physical and emotional scars of war. Veterans suffering from Post Traumatic Stress (PTS) are often hyper-vigilant of their surroundings and struggling to find purpose and mission. To help them integrate back into civilian society, we partnered with the U.S. Department of the Interior's Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to develop *Mission Mustang*®, a national program that pairs veterans battling PTS with captive mustangs experiencing the same feelings of loss and anxiety. Under the guidance of professional mustang trainers, the veterans gentle the mustangs and - as they teach the horses and prepare them to find new homes – these same men and women find themselves.

## **Volunteers Opportunities**

### **Lesson Programs**

Barn Chores

Stall Cleaning

Side Walker

Horse Handler – additional training required

Horse Leader – additional training required

Adaptive Riding/Horsemanship Program

HEAL/EAL

Administrative

Facility – Maintenance Equipment – Mowers – etc

Farm/Hay

Special Events

## **Volunteer Requirements**

### **General Requirements**

- Must be at least 14 years of age or older with written parental consent for anyone under the age of 18.
- Appropriate forms must be completed before you can volunteer: Release of Liability, Emergency Medical Authorization.
- All volunteers who are interested in working in equine lesson programming must: (1) complete an introductory on-line webinar, (2) attend a volunteer orientation and side walker training in person, and (3) participate in ongoing just-in-time training and periodic re-evaluation and supplemental training as appropriate.
- No horse experience required to volunteer in the equine program, and no horticulture experience is required to volunteer on the farm

### **Physical Requirements**

As noted above, EquiCenter has a long list of volunteer jobs, which vary as to time commitment, content, and skills required. Some jobs, such as working on the farm, side walking, and horse handling, and horse leading in lessons, require physical strength or height and may not be appropriate for everyone. There is, however, a job for most everyone, regardless of special needs or conditions. EquiCenter simply

needs to be made aware of some basic information on all volunteers in order to gauge ability levels and find the ideal position. A few examples follow.

**Farm Program.** Volunteer jobs on the farm vary with the season and can require standing, squatting, or kneeling in hot, cold, or inclement weather, for extended periods of time, moving heavy objects, and the like. The farm team will share physical requirements for different tasks with volunteers in advance, but please be sure to talk with a farm team member if a task is not appropriate for you physically. There may be another way to do the same task, or another task might be more appropriate.

**Side Walker.** The primary responsibility of the side walker is the safety of the rider under the supervision of the instructor. The side walker (either one or two) walks to the side of a horse next to a rider during a lesson or therapy session. Depending on the level of physical support the rider requires, side walkers may be required to walk with their arm extended above shoulder height for long periods of time, to jog alongside the horse through uneven and/or deep footing, or to engage in other, potentially awkward, movements. They work in hot and cold weather. They may be required to independently provide or reinforce instructions relayed orally or visually by the instructor during the lesson. They may provide physical support during mounts and dismounts, and they may assist the rider in sliding quickly to the ground if an emergency dismount is required.

**Horse Handler.** A horse handler's primary responsibility is to retrieve/return horses from their paddocks in all weather conditions while having a full understanding of the safety of entering a horse's paddock with other horses, placing a halter on them attached to a lead rope. This will require opening and closing the gates when entering and leaving the paddock while keeping the other horses and themselves safe around them. This requires proper footwear at all times and to be sure to always carry a cell phone in case you are needing assistance at any point. Horse handlers are also responsible for following the horse care instructions that are outlined in the "Barn Chore" communication board. Safety for the horse, themselves, other horses and people around them while in the barn aisle and walking in and out



from the stalls. Safely grooming a horse independently and understanding all tack, grooming tools, blankets, halters, etc is required.

**Horse Leader.** A horse leader's primary job is to ensure the well-being of the horse under the supervision of the instructor. Horse leaders usually have previous experience with equines, but still must be trained to participate in EquiCenter's adaptive riding lessons. This generally requires that the leader guide the horse during the session and independently execute the direction given visually or orally by the instructor. Horse leaders may be called to walk or jog at different speeds, in uneven and/or deep footing, in hot and cold weather, and to remember and execute different patterns in the arena. Horse leaders are required to participate and fully understand the requirements of a horse handler before becoming a horse leader.

### **WhenToHelp**

WhenToHelp ("WTH") is the online scheduling system EquiCenter uses to facilitate volunteer sign-up for lessons and all events that require sign ups. Once training has been completed, you will receive an email from WTH where you can sign in using a "Username" and "Password" . Weekly emails come from WTH and will include open shifts needing to be filled.

**General Responsibilities.** As a volunteer, you commit to:

- Be on time and adhere to our program policies.
- Volunteers should be familiar with the lesson format and be sensitive and understanding to the individual riders.
- Please feel free to always seek information or assistance whenever you are unsure of a procedure.

### **Parking**

- Volunteer Parking is located on the west side of the north barn. Please use caution when driving in and be sure to adhere to the 10 mph speed limit at all times.

- The area adjacent to the north wall of the indoor arena is reserved for participant parking.

### **Sign In/Out**

Upon arrival and departure please sign in using the **OpenTimeClock** console located in the volunteer room.

### **Name Tags**

You must wear your nametag when you are signed up to work in our lesson program. If you don't see your name on a tag, please write it down on the clipboard overhead and we will provide a name tag for you.

### **Smoking**

EquiCenter is a non-smoking/non-vaping property. For the safety, health and pleasure of everyone, please do not smoke or vape when on the property.

### **Cell Phones**

Please carry your cell phones with you when volunteering, but please silence your phone when working in a lesson so as not to inadvertently disturb a participant or horse.

### **Occurrence Report**

An occurrence is an action that can be an unusual or an unsafe event. It may or may not result in an injury to a participant, staff, volunteer or horse. Any occurrence that results in medical treatment must be reported to the barn office within 24 hours of the event. Should a horse leader or side walker perform any unsafe action before, during, or after any lessons, they may be asked to step down from the volunteer's position and be further evaluated. Additional training may be required."

### **Attire**

Due to the nature of our lesson activities, please wear comfortable clothing that you don't mind getting dirty.

- Suitable footwear must be worn at all times. Proper footwear includes shoes that offer protection and support for walking and jogging. No open-toed shoes or sandals are permitted when working with the horses.
- **Please do not wear low cut tops or short shorts.** Avoid dangling jewelry and clothing as they are unsafe. Long pants are highly recommended.
- Avoid perfume and cologne.

### **Communications/Attendance**

Volunteers are critical to EquiCenter's ability to achieve our mission. The objective of the equine program is to provide a safe adaptive riding lesson for participants. Riders especially depend on their volunteers to be there for their assigned shift. If a volunteer is unable to attend a scheduled shift and a substitute cannot be found in time, it may not be possible for a student to have their lesson. We realize emergencies arise so if you will be missing a lesson less than 24 hours from your scheduled, you must contact the barn phone at 585-624-7777 x2 AND the Volunteer Hotline, which you can call or text at 585-439-9999. We also communicate through email. If you need to remove yourself from the schedule several days in advance, please do so.

### **Confidentiality**

EquiCenter is bound by policy to maintain confidentiality of information regarding our students, staff and volunteers. Any personal information you may become privileged to through your work must not be shared with others.

### **Personal Information**

Please keep all contact information current. Yearly updated paperwork is required for all volunteers.

**Cancellation Procedure.** EquiCenter staff will alert all participants and volunteers in the event a lesson must be canceled. Reasons for cancellation include:

- School Closing - HFL-Mendon-Victor
- Winter Storms
- When the temperature is 15 degrees or feels like temperature of zero

- When the temperature is 90 degrees or feels like a temperature of 95 degrees.
  - We rely on [www.weather.com/honeoyefalls](http://www.weather.com/honeoyefalls)
- Poor air quality
  - We rely on [airnow.gov](http://airnow.gov) to inform decisions about how and whether to proceed with programming when air quality begins to degrade.

### **Reasons for Volunteer Removal**

EquiCenter holds the right to dismiss any volunteers or visitors. Possible reasons for dismissal include but not limited to:

- Failure to obey posted safety regulations
- More than one lesson disturbance
- Inappropriate or unsafe behavior
- Breach of confidentiality
- Two no show/no call for scheduled lessons
- Any other reason or behavior identified by staff to be inappropriate or detrimental or potentially detrimental to overall safety or lesson conduct.

### **Emergency Procedure**

Please see information posted in the barn aisle

### **Sexual Abuse and Molestation Prevention Policy**

All volunteers are required to abide by EquiCenter's Sexual Abuse and Molestation Prevention Policy, included in this Volunteer Manual as Attachment 1.

## Attachment 1

### Zero-Tolerance Abuse and Molestation Prevention Policy

EquiCenter, Inc. (“EquiCenter,” or the “Organization”) is committed to providing a safe, respectful, and abuse-free environment that supports the health and well-being of all people receiving our services. Through preventive measures, strict reporting procedures, and enforcing a zero-tolerance approach to sexual abuse, molestation, psychological abuse, physical abuse and neglect (each an “Abuse”), we aim to uphold the highest ethical standards. This policy establishes procedures and processes to prevent, address, and respond to complaints of Abuse toward children and vulnerable populations within the Organization.

All employees, volunteers, contractors, and board members must adhere to this policy.

#### **Definitions:**

- **Sexual Abuse:** Sexual abuse is conduct that constitutes certain crimes under the New York Penal Law. Examples include sexual assault, forcible, inappropriate touching, and prostitution offenses. This may involve physical contact or non-physical acts such as “sexual performance” offenses, voyeurism, or the distribution of sexually explicit material. Sexual abuse does not include sexual harassment, which is another form of behavior that is strictly prohibited by EquiCenter and is the subject of additional and specific policies and procedures.
- **Molestation:** Molestation is any unwelcome sexual activity, often involving a power imbalance or exploitation of vulnerability, such as inappropriate touching, fondling, or sexual advances toward minors or non-consenting adults.
- **Physical Abuse:** Physical Abuse is conduct that is intentional or reckless, causing, by physical contact, physical injury or serious or protracted impairment of the physical, mental or emotional condition of the vulnerable person or causing the likelihood of such injury or impairment.

- **Psychological Abuse:** Psychological Abuse is conduct that is intentional or reckless, causing, by verbal or nonverbal conduct, a substantial diminution of the vulnerable person's emotional, social, or behavioral development or condition, or causing the likelihood of such diminution.
- **Neglect:** any action, inaction or lack of attention that breaches an individual's duty and that results in or is likely to result in physical injury or serious or protracted impairment of the physical, mental or emotional condition of a vulnerable person.

### **Prohibited Conduct:**

EquiCenter maintains a zero-tolerance policy for any form of Abuse. All individuals affiliated with the Organization are strictly prohibited from engaging in such behavior.

### **Reporting Procedures:**

All employees, volunteers, contractors, and clients are required to immediately report any suspected or actual incidents of Abuse as noted below. No one who witnesses or suspects Abuse is required to directly confront the person who is the source of the report, question, or complaint before notifying any of the individuals listed. Reporting may be made anonymously if preferred, but detailed information is encouraged to facilitate investigation.

Reports should be made promptly through any of the following means:

1. **Direct Report to Executive Director:** Katherine Hatch, at [khatch@equicenterny.org](mailto:khatch@equicenterny.org) or 917-374-5464
2. **Direct Report to Senior Director of People and Risk Management:** Heather Edes, at [hedes@equicenterny.org](mailto:hedes@equicenterny.org) or 585-217-7143

### **Investigation Process:**

Upon receiving a report, the following steps will be taken:

1. **Initial Review:** The Executive Director and the Senior Director of People and Risk Management will immediately review the report to determine the appropriate course of action and whether further investigation is required.
2. **Notification of Authorities:** If the allegation involves a minor or meets the criteria for mandatory reporting, the Organization will notify the appropriate authorities, in compliance with New York State reporting requirements, including, but not limited to law enforcement and child protective services.
  - **Mandated Reporting Requirements in NY:** Under New York State law, any individual designated as a mandated reporter must notify the New York Statewide Central Register of Child Abuse and Maltreatment (SCR) if they suspect child abuse. Failure to do so may result in penalties. Mandated reporters can call 1-800-635-1522.
3. **Investigation:** EquiCenter will take all allegations of Abuse seriously. The Organization will promptly appoint an independent investigator or assign an internal investigation team to review the allegations in a thorough manner. Interviews will be conducted with the alleged victim, the accused, witnesses, and any other relevant individuals. EquiCenter will cooperate fully with any investigation conducted by law enforcement or other regulatory/protective services agencies.
4. **Temporary Action:** Pending the outcome of the investigation, the alleged perpetrator will be suspended or reassigned to duties that do not involve direct contact with clients, minors, or vulnerable populations.
5. **Documentation:** All steps of the investigation, including interviews and evidence collection, will be fully documented.
6. **Confidentiality.** To the fullest extent possible, but consistent with EquiCenter's legal obligation to report suspected abuse to appropriate authorities, EquiCenter will endeavor to keep the identities of the alleged victims and investigation subject confidential.

### **Response Actions:**

Based on the findings of the investigation, the following actions may be taken:

1. **Disciplinary Measures:** If the investigation substantiates that it is more likely than not that Abuse occurred, the perpetrator will face disciplinary actions, up

to and including termination of employment, and/or association with the Organization.

2. **Legal Action:** If warranted, law enforcement will be involved, and criminal charges may be pursued against the perpetrator.
3. **Support for Victims:** The Organization will offer appropriate support, including counseling, referrals, and legal assistance, to victims of Abuse.

### **Prohibition of Retaliation:**

Retaliation against individuals who report suspected Abuse in good faith is strictly prohibited. Any employee found to have retaliated against a complainant or witness who acted in good faith will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

### **Compliance with New York State Law:**

The Organization complies with all **New York State laws** related to reporting allegations or incidents of sexual abuse or misconduct to appropriate law enforcement and child or adult protective services organizations. Specifically:

- **Mandated Reporters:** Any employees who are classified as mandated reporters under New York State law must immediately report suspected child abuse to the **New York Statewide Central Register of Child Abuse and Maltreatment (SCR)**.
- **Penalties for Noncompliance:** Employees who fail to report incidents of sexual abuse or molestation, as required by law, may face legal penalties, including fines and imprisonment, and may also be subject to disciplinary action by the Organization, including, but not limited to termination.





# EquiCenter Volunteer Code of Conduct

## Introduction

The EquiCenter motto is “Where Healing Comes Naturally”. EquiCenter has done this for over 20 years by maintaining the highest standards for our programming, our people, and our horses. We need the active participation of everyone who works at EquiCenter to maintain our therapeutic healing environment. This Code of Conduct outlines the expectations and responsibilities for all EquiCenter volunteers. This is how you help us to ensure a safe, respectful, meaningful, and enjoyable environment for our participants, staff, volunteers, visitors, and horses.

## Safety

**Safety is our first priority.**

- Follow Instructions: Adhere to all safety guidelines and instructions provided by staff. Ensure the safety and well-being of horses, participants, and other volunteers.
- Report Issues: Report any safety concerns, accidents, or occurrences immediately to a staff member. Safety is everyone’s responsibility. If you are not sure if something is safe, ask first before proceeding.
- Proper Handling: It is critical for the comfort and performance of our horses that they are handled with care and according to EquiCenter’s established protocols. Although you may have experience with other methods, while at EquiCenter we will all use the established protocol. If you have any questions, please ask a staff member.

## Respect

**Treating others with respect is at the core of what the EquiCenter is about.**

- Kindness and Courtesy: Be kind, courteous, and considerate to all, including participants, fellow volunteers, staff members, and visitors.
- Welcoming Environment: Treat everyone with respect, regardless of their background, beliefs, or abilities.
- Positive Communication: Engage in constructive communication. We do not use loud or aggressive language or behavior with our horses or other people.

## Reliability

**Volunteer commitment is critical to EquiCenter's ability to achieve our mission.**

- Timeliness: Please arrive 15 minutes prior to your shift time.
- Accountability: If you are unable to attend a scheduled shift, please notify the team immediately. If within 24 hours of the shift, please make sure you get an acknowledgement by phone or text from the staff.
- Continuous Learning: Only by acknowledging mistakes can we learn and improve. Staff will provide ongoing learning and training opportunities to enhance your skills and knowledge related to EquiCenter operations.

## Boundaries

**Everyone does better with healthy boundaries – including people, horses, and plants.**

- Confidentiality: Any personal information about participants, staff, or other volunteers that you learn through your work at EquiCenter must not be shared with others.
- Understanding Role: As a volunteer, you are helping to ensure that EquiCenter participants have a great therapeutic experience. Volunteers are there to support the staff in providing that experience, please follow all staff guidance and direction.

## Conclusion

By following this Code of Conduct, we create a positive and respectful therapeutic atmosphere where everyone can contribute effectively and enjoyably. Thank you for your dedication and commitment to the EquiCenter and our mission.

I agree to comply with the EquiCenter Volunteer Code of Conduct. I also agree that not following the EquiCenter Volunteer Code of Conduct will result in consequences which could include refresher training, suspension, or removal as a volunteer.