

# GRACE LAKE VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK



## [Volunteer Mission Statement](#)

**To provide committed, skilled, trained, and experienced volunteers whose passion is to meet the varied needs of others at Grace Lake.**



Dear Volunteer,

Welcome to Grace Lake Ministries Equine Assisted Services! We are looking forward to partnering with you to serve our participants.

Grace Lake adheres to the high safety standards of the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International (PATH Intl.) and is a PATH Intl. Center Member since we began in 2004. Our goal is to provide committed, skilled, trained, and experienced volunteers whose passion is to meet the varied needs of others at Grace Lake.

We offer several distinctive Equine Assisted Services: Adaptive Riding, Groundwork Connection, and Equine Assisted Physical Therapy. Below are a couple of other unique qualities that our participants enjoy.

First, Grace Lake is a God centered program. Each of our classes begin with prayer. Our mission is to partner with horses to develop life skills and God centered wholeness for those with diverse physical, developmental, and emotional needs. Our goal is to facilitate the development of wholeness into the lives of the people that we serve. We believe that wholeness begins by knowing and following Jesus Christ. We trust God to lead us down the path that each individual needs to reach their full potential.

Second, our riders enjoy the beautiful trail rides offered on this historic 230-acre ranch in Collin County. We are grateful to have the opportunity to work on balance, focus, and improve riding skills using natural obstacles while participants connect with their horse in a peaceful and natural setting of ponds, hills, trees, and wildlife.

And lastly, Grace Lake is a 501©3 nonprofit organization committed to keeping our programs affordable for our participants. We work diligently to make this possible through ongoing fundraising events, company sponsorships, grant applications, and the generous support from our individual donors in our community. As a part of our Grace Lake family, you are in a unique position to assist with our fundraising success by sharing your experience at Grace Lake and linking us to potential collaborative resources. Funds raised go directly to supporting our specially trained therapy horse herd, maintaining our beautiful horse facility and unique trails, and keeping quality Equine Assisted Services affordable to our special needs participants. We are thankful for your support!

Blessings,  
Holly Robinson  
Director [director@gracelakeministries.org](mailto:director@gracelakeministries.org)  
(972)837-4621

## Our Programs

**Adaptive Riding** is a program that focuses on teaching riding skills to those ages 5 and older with diverse cognitive, physical, intellectual, learning, and social-emotional challenges. Professional riding instructors and trained volunteers work with riders to develop their independent equestrian skills that carry over to improve their daily life functioning. While learning specific riding skills, riders will play games on horseback, maneuver through an obstacle course, or challenge their skills with a trail ride. Benefits include: flexibility, balance, muscle strength, recreational outlet.

**Physical Therapy** is a program for children ages 2 and older with movement and sensory dysfunction. The participant receives physical therapy treatment on the ground and while mounted on a horse. The horse provides a consistent and rhythmic movement pattern that simulates the pelvic/trunk movement of the human gait. Benefits include: trunk mobility and strength, postural strength and endurance, proprioception, weight bearing, motor planning.

**Groundwork Connection** is an equine assisted learning program that's all about having fun and building relationships with a horse on the ground rather than riding them. Participants that benefit include those with developmental challenges such as autism, ADHD, and trauma. Through exercises and obstacles, participants learn how to build rapport, trust, connection and confidence with the horse. Being eye-to-eye with the horse enables a deep bond and personal relationship. Horses communicate with each other through non-verbal communication. Participants are empowered by learning what the slightest movement can mean when reading the horse's non-verbal communication. Benefits include: increased ability to focus, read and understand non-verbal communication with humans, positive self-talk/thoughts, spatial awareness, ability to express self.

## **Volunteer Opportunities**

**Become a Sidewalker-** The sidewalker walks alongside the horse while the rider is riding. The primary responsibility of a sidewalker is to maintain constant awareness of the rider and their safety during the lesson, while providing physical and motivational support.

**Qualifications for Sidewalker** – Minimum age is 14. You must be able to walk briskly in sand and jog intermittently for short periods of time while the horse is trotting. You must be able to walk in sand for 45 minutes and on uneven ground when going out on trail rides. You must be able to provide physical support for a rider which may require you to have your hand on the rider's thigh while walking beside them. You must be committed for the time slot you sign up for to come out each week and attend a volunteer training prior to your first class.

**Become a Horse Leader** –The primary responsibility of the horse leader is to maintain control of the horse during pre-class grooming, as well as during the lesson. The horse leader is also responsible for guiding, stopping, and starting the horse without making the rider feel that they are simply along for the ride.

**Qualifications for Horse Leader** – Minimum age is 14. You must be able to walk briskly in sand and jog intermittently for short periods of time while the horse is trotting. You must be able to walk in sand for 45 minutes and on uneven ground when going out on trail rides. You must have experience with horses and horse behaviors. You must be committed for the time slot you sign up for to come out each week and attend a volunteer training prior to your first class.

As a volunteer supported organization, we ask that you prayerfully consider the areas that you can serve and volunteer at Grace Lake. Below is a list of possible ways to contribute other than directly participating in classes:

- Check to see if your employer has a charitable giving program. Employers often offer grant programs to organizations with whom their employees volunteer their

time. Some employers also offer matching donation programs in which they match employee donations. Additionally, some employers offer volunteer hour match programs. Through these programs employers will often donate on your behalf once a set number of volunteer hours have been completed.

- When shopping on Amazon, enter their site through Amazon Smile and choose Grace Lake as your non-profit of choice. A portion of your purchase will be donated back to Grace Lake. We also have an Amazon Wishlist. [Charity Lists \(amazon.com\)](#)
- Advocate for Grace Lake in the community by liking and sharing our Facebook posts. Share our newsletters and website with others. <https://www.facebook.com/gracelakeministries>
- Connect us to resources (donors, sponsors) in the community.
- Help us fundraise by sharing our information for the North Texas Giving Day event held yearly in September.
- Donate items such as bottled water, Kleenex, paper towels, and stamps.
- Make a donation. Every donation counts! Both small and large donations are needed to operate the program.
- Share any specialized skills you have such as photography, videography, marketing/advertising, fundraising, carpentry, grant writing, horse training, etc.

## Safety Rules

The following guidelines have been developed for your safety:

- No individuals should enter any space with a loose horse in it unless they have attended the Grace Lake Horse Leader training.
- Only the instructors, staff, and horse leaders are allowed to get horses from the pens.
- When approaching a horse, always consider the horse's limited field of vision. Horses cannot see directly behind or in front of them without moving their head. Always approach a horse at the shoulder, speak to them as you approach, and then extend your hand and pat them on the neck or shoulder. When moving around a horse, placing a hand on their hip as you move around them allows them to know where you are.
- Avoid sudden movements when around the horse. This includes reacting to flying insects, grasshoppers, etc., which we have here. You cannot leave your rider! This also includes raising arms suddenly, running, jumping, etc. Horses can spook easily. Please keep this in mind at all time when around horses.
- Never sit or kneel on the ground near a horse.
- Please arrive no earlier than 30 minutes before your scheduled class.
- Please do not bring dogs or other animals to the barn.
- Phones must be turned to silent or vibrate during classes.
- Do not feed the horses. Due to some of our horses being on a special diet, Grace Lake has a policy of no feeding treats of any kind to the horses. Thank you for your support in ensuring the health and safety of our wonderful therapy horses!

- No Unattended Children - Please don't bring your children with you when you are volunteering. They cannot be left unattended while you volunteer.
- We ask that all volunteers be mindful of the fact that Grace Lake facilities are located on private property. Access to the property is limited to specific class times and scheduled events.

## **Lesson Schedule and Cancellation Policy**

Lessons are 45 minutes to 1 hour long and held once a week. Lessons are grouped together in sessions (10 weeks for Spring and Fall and 5 weeks for Summer).

Grace Lake programs are conducted outdoors and subject to weather cancellations. If Grace Lake must cancel a class due to weather or other circumstances, we will schedule a makeup class at the end of the session. Grace Lake keeps you updated via text messages in Remind. If a participant cancels, Grace Lake will notify you with a Remind text.

If you are sick or unable to make your class for any reason, please use Remind to text us as soon as possible that day. If you have dates that you already know you will not be able to fulfill, please inform the Volunteer Coordinator as soon as possible so that a sub may be found for you. Our participants depend on the support of the volunteers!

## **Attire**

It is important that you dress safely, comfortably, and conservatively.

- Closed toed shoes are required. No sandals or flip flops.
- Long pants are recommended. The grass is sometimes tall when we go out for a trail ride.
- Please do not wear big or priceless jewelry as it can easily get lost or caught on something.

## What to Expect During A Class

**Mounting:** The horse leader will lead the horse up to the mounting block when the instructor indicates they are ready. Sidewalkers are responsible for assisting the instructor in the mounting process. The right hand sidewalker (opposite side of the horse leader) may be asked to help during the mount by assisting the participant's leg over the hind end of the horse and placing the participant's foot in the stirrup. The instructor will always be the one to mount and dismount the participant, and provide guidance as to the assistance they need. The left hand sidewalker (located behind the horse leader) will take over for the instructor after the mount has been completed. Note: This may vary as directed by the instructor.

**The Class:** Once the mount is completed, the horse leader will lead the horse away from the mounting block and wait for directions from the instructor. The horse leader needs to remain focused on leading the horse at the proper pace, maintaining correct spacing from other horses, and listening for instructions from the instructor.

Sidewalkers are often asked and encouraged to interact with the participant during games and activities. Please speak one at a time so as not to overwhelm the participant. Please remember that the instructor is the one who should be instructing the participant and that you are providing assistance to the participant as directed. Both sidewalkers are responsible for assisting the participant with balance and follow-through on exercises. It is very important that participants are allowed to do as much for themselves as possible, so please only provide assistance as needed.

As a sidewalker, you have an up-close view of the participant throughout the class. Please notify the instructor regarding any horse tack issues, or health/behavioral problems the participant may experience. Sidewalkers should be capable of keeping up with the speed of the horse and walking and jogging in sand. If, at any time, you do not feel comfortable doing this, please notify the instructor.

We value volunteers. Each person at Grace Lake plays an important role in the success of the participant. But always remember that in a class, the instructor is in charge. Please show respect to the instructor by allowing them to do the instructing.

Instructing is the responsibility of the instructor only. Volunteers have a valuable perspective to share, and we encourage you to share with the instructor before or after the class.

**Dismounting:** The horse leader will listen to instructions from the instructor as to where to go for the dismount. This is typically in the center of the arena and facing the parking lot. The left hand sidewalker (behind the horse leader) will drop off when the instructor takes over and the right hand sidewalker will assist as directed by the instructor.

**Emergency During a Lesson:** If there is an emergency from a fall, seizure, kick, bite, etc. during a lesson, all horses will be halted and all horse leaders will position themselves in an appropriate posture to control the horse. The horse leaders are ONLY responsible for the horse, not the participant. The sidewalkers are ONLY responsible for the participant, not the horse.

In the event that a participant must be removed from the horse quickly, as in a seizure or a horse that has spooked, the closest sidewalker is responsible for removing the participant in a safe manner.

If circumstances call for the arena to be evacuated, the participants will be escorted out by their volunteers and the horses will be removed by their horse leaders to an appropriate location, after the participants are out of danger.

The instructor will determine if medical personnel are required and will request assistance in contacting specific personnel. Regardless of the circumstance of the emergency, the instructor on duty is in charge and their instructions are to be followed.

## Confidentiality Policy

Grace Lake staff makes every effort to maintain confidentiality regarding individual participants and their personal information. During classes you may be told information about participants in order to safely and effectively assist a person. This information generally is confidential.

Try to be discreet about confidential information you are told by a participant or their family members and absolutely do not pass on information you may be told during a class. Keep things to yourself even with other volunteers. If you are asked by someone, "What disability does Mrs. Jackson have?" by a center visitor, it is not appropriate for you to discuss it. Be friendly, but explain that confidentiality is part of your volunteer role at Grace Lake and that this question should be best put to Mrs. Jackson herself, or may be taken to the center leadership.

**Limits of Confidentiality:** There may be situations where you feel it is necessary to reveal confidential information in order to keep someone safe. For example, a participant may tell you that she has a severe medical problem that day, but she really wants to ride. You may question the safety of that decision. Discreetly sharing the information with the center staff is really your responsibility; you are not bound by confidentiality in this case. Your primary role is to keep the participants safe. Use your common sense. If anyone at the center tells you something that is troubling to you, such as threatening suicide (even in a flippant manner), it is your responsibility to tell an instructor or person in charge in a confidential manner.



We are excited you have decided to join our Grace Lake family! No matter what function you serve here, your service is crucial and truly does change lives. Thank you!

Grace Lake Ministries, Inc.  
9611 FM 1827  
Anna, TX 75409  
(972) 837-4621  
[www.gracelakeministries.org](http://www.gracelakeministries.org)  
Shelley Egger, Volunteer Coordinator  
admin@gracelakeministries.org