



UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
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University of Minnesota Retirees Volunteer Center

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY

River Valley Riders Equine-Assisted Services Program

Brief summary of organization's mission:

River Valley Riders (RVR) is a nonprofit organization that seeks to create a supportive community where people with special needs connect with horses and experience life-changing benefits.

Equine-assisted services include therapeutic horseback riding, carriage driving, and hippotherapy. RVR's programming helps participants gain self-confidence and self-esteem, build strength, and improve balance and hand-eye coordination, while forming meaningful relationships.

Description of organization activity requiring volunteers:

Volunteers will assist people with special needs to safely ride horses by leading horses and by providing physical and/or verbal support to riders.

Details of volunteer duties:

Volunteers assist riders during therapeutic sessions led by an instructor certified by the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship (PATH) International.

Primary volunteer roles include:

1. Leading horses during riding lessons.
2. Providing physical and/or verbal support to the riders by walking alongside them as "side-walkers". Physical support will be directed by the instructor and may entail holding the rider's ankle or leg.
3. Side-walkers interact with riders to assist communicating the instructor's directions and help ensure safety.
4. Volunteers may also assist in grooming horses and preparing tack.

Dates, times (length of shifts, if applicable), and locations:

Riding sessions start in mid-April and continue through the end of October. Sessions are held weekly on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday evenings. There are 3 riding sessions per night, lasting 45 minutes each, and starting at 5:00, 6:00 and 7:00 p.m. for all evenings. Volunteers may participate in as many sessions as desired per night. Riding may be in the outdoor or indoor arena, depending on the weather.

There are also daytime volunteer opportunities working with school groups (spring and fall on Tuesday mornings) and assisting with the Hippotherapy lessons on Wednesday mornings in the summer.

Sessions are held at the RVR site in Afton, MN (2007 Neal Avenue South).

Volunteer eligibility and training requirements:

No prior experience with horses is required.

New volunteers attend an all-day volunteer training session, which will be held on **Saturday, April 6th** for the 2024 riding season. The session consists of a morning virtual presentation session, followed by an afternoon on-site hands-on session. If you cannot attend on April 6th, alternate monthly training sessions will be held starting in May.

*Volunteers must also pass a background check, which is arranged by RVR at no cost to the volunteer.

Physical expectations/limitations:

Volunteers must be capable of walking with the horse on the sand surface of the arena for at least 45 minutes. Brisk walking/jogging may be required when the horse trots for approximately 50 yards. Volunteers must agree to follow established policies covering conduct to assure the safety of all riders, volunteers, and horses.

What to wear (or not to wear):

Volunteers should dress appropriately for the weather and be prepared for indoor and outdoor lessons (determined by RVR's instructor team). This includes dressing in layers comfortable for physical activity and wearing supportive and protective footwear: e.g., closed-toe/closed-back shoes or boots. The dress code is casual and modest: no short shorts; no low-cut shirts or tank tops.

Parking/Transportation: Free parking is provided on site.

Volunteers' food/beverage availability:

There is no food availability on site; volunteers should bring what they need. Water is available.

COVID precautions and other safety information:

An organizational infectious disease policy is in effect.

**Please indicate at registration whether you are a URVC/UMRA volunteer.*

**Deadline for volunteer application: March 31, 2024****To register for this activity**

Click on the following link to contact RVR for more information on volunteer registration:

[River Valley Riders Volunteer](#)

You may also contact the University Retirees Volunteer Center,
by email (preferred) at URVC@UMN.EDU
or by phone at 612-625-8016

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

For more information on available volunteer opportunities, contact the URVC Office at urvc@umn.edu or 612-625-8016