



**PROMISE LANDING  
FARM**

**VOLUNTEER  
HANDBOOK**

**Including Orientation, Sidewalker Training and Emergency  
Procedures**

Promise Landing Farm is a creative engine for inclusivity, engaging community members with and without disabilities in meaningful interactions with each other and their equine partners to foster a community where everyone is valued and included.

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# WELCOME TO PROMISE LANDING FARM!

Promise Landing Farm, Inc. provides equine-assisted services (EAS) to adults and children with and without a wide variety of disabilities. Volunteers are the backbone of our program and an integral part of our mission. We are so pleased that you want to become a volunteer at Promise Landing Farm!

Our riders may need the support of up to three volunteers to safely and successfully learn to ride. We try to keep the same team together throughout a session so both the riders and volunteers can benefit from continuity and establish a lasting relationship of trust with one another.

Volunteer training is an ongoing process. We hope that what you learn in the orientation session will be a good foundation for you to build upon as you spend time at Promise Landing Farm. This handbook is designed to serve as a reference after your orientation to the program. Volunteer duties, tips on working with horses and persons with disabilities, and specific information about Promise Landing Farm are included within. Each rider has their individual needs and each week brings its own challenges, so we consider volunteering as an on-going learning experience. **Thank you for your volunteer support!**

## Promise Landing Farm VOLUNTEER CONTACT INFORMATION

**Volunteer Coordinator: Brittany Lester**

**Phone:** (410) 980-3769

**Email:** [brittany@promiselandingfarm.com](mailto:brittany@promiselandingfarm.com)

**Program Director: Emily Hanna**

**Phone:** (443) 995-1208

**Email:** [emily@promiselandingfarm.com](mailto:emily@promiselandingfarm.com)

Please call, text or email us regarding absences, schedule changes, questions or concerns

# BENEFITS OF OUR PROGRAMS

Promise Landing Farm serves children and adults with a variety of mental, physical and emotional challenges, as well as people without disabilities. Instructors design and monitor individualized lessons for each student to address their physical, emotional, and social needs while they learn skills of horseback riding. Individual goals encourage each rider to improve their riding skills and achieve life goals.

The benefits of adaptive riding are threefold:

1. **Physical** - The three-dimensional motion of the horse provides the rider hip, back and core action that simulates natural walking. Riding relaxes and strengthens muscles and improves body tone, posture, balance, joint mobility, and coordination.
2. **Emotional** - Contact with horses and horsemanship training provides a non-competitive setting for learning. New abilities, self-discipline, and improved concentration build self-confidence and emotional well-being. Participation in our programs can also foster a foundation of trust and emotional connection between both animals and humans alike.
3. **Social** - Riders gain independence and a sense of being part of a team, sometimes for the first time. It is an opportunity for them to interact with other riders and their team, building relationships that will further enhance their positive self-image.

## GENERAL INFORMATION

**All individuals must complete Promise Landing Farm volunteer training to be considered for any volunteer position. Additional training is required for horse leader positions. Please contact the volunteer coordinator if you are interested in becoming a horse leader.**

### GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

Volunteers must be a minimum of 13 years old, and minors must have all required forms signed by a parent/guardian. Because working with horses can be a potentially dangerous situation, all prospective volunteers must attend an initial volunteer training and have all required forms listed below on file at Promise Landing Farm as well as attend any additional trainings required throughout the year. Volunteers need to be able to work as part of a team and be flexible to changes.

Volunteers should be able to follow directions, take instruction, and work independently with minimal PLF staff supervision. Volunteers who need the support of another person in order to volunteer are welcome to volunteer in the barn. Support staff/aids must also complete volunteer paperwork and orientation.

### REQUIRED FORMS

As a potential volunteer the volunteer application must be fully completed prior to attending training. Volunteer paperwork must be updated annually to comply with PATH Intl. standards.

## CONFIDENTIALITY

Promise Landing Farm deeply respects all who participate in our programs. Confidentiality in regard to all personal information about participants is essential. As part of your application you are required to sign an annual Confidentiality Agreement, which obligates you not to discuss personal information about any Promise Landing Farm participant. Volunteers may NOT take pictures of our riders or other volunteers without getting prior consent. Pictures of our facility and horses are always welcome. Those interested in volunteering to take pictures of lessons for PLF use should contact the Volunteer Coordinator.

## VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

**Sidewalker:** A person who walks beside the horse and offers support and stability to the rider. This person must be attentive to the rider and the instructor.

Qualifications:

- Able to walk, and jog periodically, for up to an hour (indoors/outdoors) on uneven surfaces
- Able to hold your arm raised and out to the side for extended periods of time
- Adequate vision and hearing to ensure the safety of horses and participants
- Comfortable working with individuals with disabilities (including physical contact)
- Commitment to attend lesson each week for the duration of a session (preferred but not required)
- Horse experience helpful, but not required

**Horse Leader:** A person who is responsible for leading the horse and/or assisting the rider in controlling the horse during the lesson. Horse Leaders have a green star on the bottom corner of their nametag.

Qualifications:

- Experience working directly with a variety of horses
- Able to walk, and jog periodically, for up to an hour (indoors/outdoors) on uneven surfaces
- Adequate vision and hearing to ensure the safety of horses and participants
- Able to attend an initial horse leader training
- Able to groom and tack a horse independently
- Commitment to attend lesson each week for the duration of a session (preferred but not required)

**Barn Volunteers:** Barn volunteers help maintain the farm and care for the horses. This person may clean equipment, do general barn maintenance (picking stalls, picking paddocks, watering, sweeping, etc.), or groom horses, depending on interests, abilities, and PLF's needs.

Qualifications:

- Horse experience preferred, but not required. If you would like to work with the horses, please speak to the volunteer coordinator

\*Barn Volunteers scheduled while lessons are occurring are “standby” sidewalkers and may be called upon to assist as a sidewalker if the lesson is shorthanded. If your preference is to be a Barn Volunteer only, be sure to communicate that to the Volunteer Coordinator.

Continuing education opportunities will be offered to volunteers so they can improve their horse care and handling skills if they so desire.

**Other Volunteer Opportunities:** There are many other ways to volunteer with Promise Landing Farm. If you indicated on your Volunteer Application that you would be interested in volunteering in other areas, we will reach out to you as we need volunteers in those areas. If you have a special skill that is not included on the form, please let us know.

## **VOLUNTEER INCENTIVES AND AWARD PROGRAM**

Awards are given out in appreciation of volunteers who have reached certain **hour milestones** of volunteering. The current milestones are 50, 100, 250, and 500 hours volunteered. The Volgistics iPad is used to track hours for these awards so in order to accrue hours you must sign in and out. If you are curious how many hours you already have you can look that up by logging into Volgistics and clicking on the “My Service History” tab.

We also have monthly (for barn volunteers) and by session (for regular lesson volunteers and subs) gift card raffles. **Barn volunteers** earn one raffle ticket for every 2 hours (one “shift”) that they volunteer in the barn. **Regular lesson volunteers** earn one raffle ticket for perfect attendance in each assigned lesson (with exceptions for emergencies and COVID exposure or diagnosis). **Lesson subs** earn one raffle ticket for each sub slot filled.

## **VOLUNTEER TERMINATION**

For everyone’s safety, a volunteer who cannot or will not safely and fully perform the functions or duties of their assigned volunteer role will either be reassigned or relieved of their volunteer position. Volunteers are expected to read, understand and adhere to the information contained in this handbook, as well as the PLF rules posted in the office and the bulletin board outside of the tack room. Absolutely no volunteer who is intoxicated or chemically impaired will be allowed to volunteer at Promise Landing Farm. If there is a question, Promise Landing Farm staff will err on the side of caution and will not permit the individual to complete their volunteer duties.

Any volunteer or guest who behaves in an unsafe manner will be immediately asked to alter their behavior. Depending on the severity of the incident, the individual may be asked to immediately leave the property and may not be permitted to visit PLF in the future. Examples of unacceptable behavior include, but are not limited to, abuse or harassment of people or animals, chemical impairment or intoxication, possession of firearms, and illegal activities.

## **EMERGENCY PROCEDURES**

All instructors are certified in first aid and CPR. The human first aid kit and major medical supplies are located in the following locations: In lounge in cabinet under counter labeled "First Aid Kit"

### **A. Major Injury**

1. If a major injury occurs during a lesson (i.e., a fall or medical event), any other riders in the ring should immediately halt.
2. The instructor will appoint someone to:
  - Phone emergency number and read directions to Promise Landing Farm to the operator. These directions can be found by each phone. Remember to stay on the line.
  - Remain in the area to direct emergency vehicles and reassure people in the arena.
  - Get the injured person's file from the office and give it to the instructor.
3. The instructor will appoint a volunteer to:
  - Go to the road and wait for the emergency vehicles to arrive.
  - Stop the driver and have lights and sirens turned off so the horses and participants will not be frightened.
  - Tell the driver where the accident is and how to get there.
4. At the direction of the instructor, the class will continue in an orderly manner or return to the barn.
5. An incident report will be completed by the instructor.

### **B. Minor Injury**

1. If during a lesson, any other riders in the ring should immediately halt.
2. The needs of the injured individual will be met as guided by the instructor.
3. If the injured person is a participant, the horse leader (or assigned volunteer) will take the horse back to the barn to be untacked and put away.
4. If the injured person can't or shouldn't walk, a car may be driven to the area if possible.
5. The rest of the class will continue in an orderly manner.
6. An incident report will be completed by the instructor.



## PRE-EXISTING WEATHER CONDITIONS

Promise Landing Farm generally follows Prince George's County Public Schools for weather-related closures. PLF programs also may be canceled in cases where current or approaching weather conditions may impact the safety of our participants, volunteers, or horses. Some instances may be tornado warnings, hurricanes, high heat, extreme cold and wind conditions. If any or all classes at Promise Landing Farm are canceled, a staff member will attempt to contact you as soon as possible.

## INCLEMENT WEATHER CONDITIONS

Promise Landing Farm monitors weather conditions when inclement weather is forecast. If severe storm or tornado warnings develop during class times, classes will be delayed until conditions are safe. In the event of a **sudden emergency or imminent danger**, horse leaders or staff members will hold the horses while riders are dismounted and moved to safety. Participants, visitors, volunteers, and staff will then shelter in place in the feed room or boarder tack room. In the event of an **earthquake**, participants, volunteers, visitors, and staff will evacuate the barn and meet at the red fence post outside paddock # 4.

All classes will be cancelled in the event of a **Hurricane Warning** in our immediate area. Classes will resume when no remaining bands are in the area and when major debris clean-up is complete. *If you would like to assist Promise Landing Farm with tagging or evacuating horses if needed, preparing the properties for impact, or if you would like to assist with clean-up after the storm has passed, please contact us.*

## FIRE

In case of fire within the facility, **at the the direction of PLF** , the procedures below will be followed:

- The closest fire alarm will be pulled by a designated person.
- A call will be made to 911 by a designated person. Heat and smoke sensors located throughout the barn should also alert emergency services.
- If the fire is small, staff members may choose to use fire extinguishers located throughout the barn.
- Participants will be dismounted.
- Instructor will designate one sidewalker to guide participants, families and sidewalkers to vacate the area immediately and proceed to the red fence post outside paddock # 4 (unless otherwise directed)
- **No one shall leave the premises until all have been accounted for.**
- Instructors and staff members will tend to horses:
  - o If safe to do so, horses will be taken out to a safe paddock.
  - o When all horses are out, instructors and staff will join others at the red fence post.
  - o Horses will be separated as needed from there.

# THE VOLUNTEER TEAM

The Volunteer Team is what makes adaptive riding possible; consequently the quality of the volunteers directly affects the quality of the lesson. We are thankful for all of our volunteer teams and the opportunities they provide for our riders.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD VOLUNTEER

- ★ **Reliability** – Regular attendance and/or advanced notice of absences is a must. Lessons don't happen without you!
- ★ **Punctuality** – Our lessons are scheduled tightly. It is important to start on time. If you are running late, please contact us as soon as possible.
- ★ **Physical Fitness** – Within reason!! Please know your physical limitations and stay within them. Notify staff if they affect your volunteer duties. Please let staff know if you are having difficulties.
- ★ **Alertness** – Be aware of yourself and your surroundings. Despite your outward relaxation, always anticipate an unexpected emergency.
- ★ **Empathy** – Please interact with a rider as you would with anyone else. It is important to have genuine empathy and regard toward riders.
- ★ **Patience** – Many participants will need additional time to process information, execute on directions, or self-regulate emotions. Bring your patience and remember, we are here for them!

## WHAT TO WEAR

- Volunteering at a barn is dirty work so dress accordingly. You will get dirty! Also, what you choose to wear can affect the way you move. Be sensible and remember that you will need to bend and stretch to be able to support your rider, lead the horse or work in the barn. Dress in layers that you can shed as you exercise, especially during the cooler months. During the summer, be sure you dress coolly. If you do wear a hat, make sure that it fits well and will not fly off while in the arena. Sunglasses are a big plus in the sunny months and sunscreen and bug spray are recommended.
- Avoid dangly earrings, necklaces and bracelets that can hamper your movements, get pulled by a rider, or distract the horse.
- Refrain from wearing perfumes and using scented lotion. Fragrances will attract bugs and some participants may have allergies or sensitivities to scents.
- You will be doing a lot of walking and possibly some jogging on uneven terrain, so comfortable shoes are important. Choose sturdy, closed toe and heel shoes. Riding boots, hiking boots or sturdy running shoes are a good choice. High-heeled shoes, sandals, and open heel shoes such as "Crocs" or clogs are not safe footwear for volunteering at Promise Landing Farm and will not be allowed.
- **ALL PERSONS MUST WEAR AN ASTM-SEI APPROVED HELMET WHEN MOUNTED.**

## SCHEDULING

After you attend Volunteer Training your available times will be confirmed and you will be given access to Volgistics to sign up for volunteer duties based on your schedule and our needs. Continuity is very important to our riders and we hope that you will fulfill your assigned volunteer duties consistently once the session begins.

We do understand that there will be times when you will have to miss your volunteer duties. If you know in advance, please inform staff as soon as you know you will be missing your assigned volunteer time, such as vacations, school commitments, or other scheduled events.

In the event you are unable to come at the last minute due to illness or family emergency, **please call the Volunteer Coordinator** as soon as possible so that we can try to find someone to fill in for you. If there is no answer, please leave a detailed voicemail or send a text message!

If any or all classes at Promise Landing Farm are canceled, a staff member will attempt to contact you as soon as possible.

## VOLGISTICS

All volunteers have their own log-in to Volgistics, our volunteer scheduling program. The website is: <https://www.volgistics.com/ex2/vicnet.dll/?from=463162> The link to Volgistics is also located at the bottom of the volunteer page on our website (<https://www.promiselandingfarm.org/volunteer>).

Your username is the email address that was on your volunteer form. You are given a temporary password after orientation and then prompted to change it when logging in the first time. If you need your password reset, please contact the Volunteer Coordinator.

To sign up to volunteer in the barn: Log into Volgistics and then click on the "My Schedule" tab. From there you can click on the date you are available to volunteer and click the "schedule me" spot next to "you choose the times" and select the times you will be here. Monday-Saturday 10am-6pm are open unless otherwise noted. Any specific barn tasks will have a separate sign up option for the specific times needed.

## ARRIVAL, SIGN-IN AND RECORDING HOURS

### Upon arrival, please do the following:

1. **Please follow the current mask policy.** This is posted on red paper around the barn and will be posted on Facebook and emailed to volunteers every time there is a change.
2. **Put on your name tag.** Your name tag will be hanging on the cabinets next to the iPad in the tack room when you arrive on your first day of volunteering. If you have misplaced your nametag, please ask for a temporary one. It is very important to wear your name tag so others can identify you. Notify the Volunteer Coordinator if you need a new name tag so a new one can be made.
3. **Sign In.** Sign in using the iPad on the counter in the tack room. Your PIN is located on the back of your name tag. Directions for signing in on the iPad are located on the counter next to the iPad.
  - a. If you need verification of the total number of your volunteer hours, please notify the Volunteer Coordinator. Verification of your total hours are only as accurate as the hours you log on the iPad. You must log all of your hours in order to receive proper credit for hours served.
4. **Check the posted volunteer schedule on the board in the aisle to confirm your assignment for the day.** On occasion, such as if a rider cancels or another volunteer is sick, you may be assigned to do something different than your usual duties.

## GENERAL VOLUNTEER GUIDELINES AND SAFETY REGULATIONS

As with any program we have a few guidelines and safety regulations to be followed by all volunteers:

1. Smoking, drugs and alcohol are not allowed anywhere on Promise Landing Farm property during operating hours.
2. Please leave pets at home unless it is a service animal or has been approved in advance. All pets must be leashed.
3. Cell phone usage is not permitted during lesson time.
4. Please do not feed the horses without permission. Horse treats are only to be given using designated treat bowls.
5. Volunteers should aid the rider only if needed or as directed by the instructor. This includes putting on helmets, belts and during instruction time. If they are capable of accomplishing even a small part of a task, let the rider do it.
6. Riders need to develop independence, but not at the expense of an accident. Always assess the safety of a situation before making a decision. When in doubt, ask the instructor or another staff member. Always err on the side of caution!
7. During the lesson, please keep conversation very minimal so that the rider can listen to the instructor. Please limit unnecessary conversation with riders during lessons. If they attempt to engage you in conversation, politely direct their attention back to the instructor. Be attentive to the instructor at all times to maintain the highest standards of safety.
8. If you have any suggestions, questions or concerns about any aspect of the program or your assigned duties, please talk with the instructor or other Promise Landing Farm staff. Please do not discuss concerns with other volunteers or riders.

## SIDEWALKER GUIDELINES

The sidewalker(s) help the rider with balance and reinforce instructions in the lesson. If there are two sidewalkers, the inside sidewalker (one closest to the center of the ring) or the person designated by the instructor will clarify instructions. Too many people talking to the rider can be confusing.

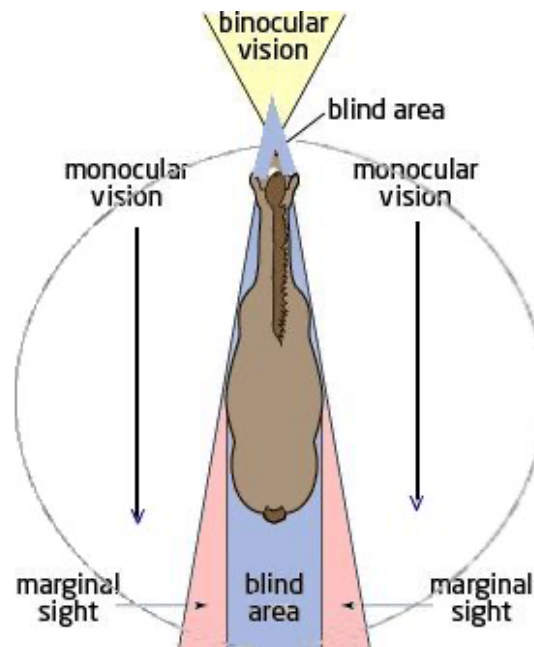
- Check daily lesson schedules prior to each class as there may be changes in your volunteer assignment. If you are uncomfortable with any assignment you are given, please notify staff immediately.
- Confirm the emergency dismount procedure for all new riders prior to the start of the session.
- Different methods are used with individual riders, depending on their needs. Listen to the instructor for the type of assistance your rider requires. If you are unsure, ASK!!!
- Introduce yourself to new riders.
- Always ask a rider if it is okay to touch him/her and, after getting permission to do so, remember to use closed fingers rather than open fingers and use a firm pressure rather than light pressure.
- Offer only as much support as the rider needs.
- If a rider only has one sidewalker, ask the instructor which side to walk on. Usually it will be the right, opposite side of the leader, but if a rider has a specific weakness, you may be needed on the left.
- Observe the rider with your front or side vision at all times. Never become so relaxed that you are not totally aware of the rider, horse, leader, instructor and environment around you.
- Do not lean on the horse or rider since this pressure may unbalance the rider or horse.
- When the rider is using body and leg aids and does not need to be supported with a hold, do not touch the horse, saddle or pad since this may interfere with the aid applied by the rider.
- You may need to reinforce the instructor's directions, assist the rider in carrying out instructions, or direct the rider's attention to the task.
- Allow the rider plenty of time to process the information before you begin to assist.
- Refrain from social conversation during the lesson.
- ASK THE LEADER TO STOP THE HORSE IF:
  1. The rider is off balance and cannot regain it while the horse is moving.
  2. The saddle has slipped or the girth is loose.
  3. The stirrups need adjusting.
  4. The rider's helmet needs to be adjusted.
  5. The rider is fatigued, in pain, or needs to stop for other reasons.
  6. Your sidewalkers need to change sides, tie a shoelace or are having some difficulty and cannot carry out their job in comfort or efficiency. Get the instructor's help when changing sides. Never leave the rider unsupported.

### The four basic methods of sidewalker support are:

1. **Spotting:** Walk beside rider's leg to assist when needed, staying within arm's reach of the rider at all times unless otherwise instructed
2. **Ankle/heel hold:** One hand is placed between the rider's ankle and the horse. This is done to keep a rider from digging their heels into the horse's side and encourages the rider to keep their heels down and leg directly under their body rather than in front of or behind.
3. **Thigh hold:** Place your arm closest to the rider across the rider's thigh and grasp the front edge of the saddle or saddle pad. Do NOT stick fingers into saddle parts.
4. **Belt hold/back support:** This is not a common method of support in adaptive riding lessons, but you may be asked to assist with this support. Hold the rider's gait-belt to assist with balance. This is done while supporting the legs. It is important to keep your hold light and not apply pressure that might cause the rider to become unbalanced.

## HORSE BEHAVIOR

Horses are prey animals and have several blind spots around them (see below diagram). Care should always be taken around horses to never run or yell around them or to walk up to them unannounced.



# Volunteer Handbook Agreement

Dear Volunteer,

Thank you for taking time to read this Volunteer Handbook. Because our volunteers are the heart of Promise Landing Farm, your comments are very important to us.

Please take the time to fill out the form below.

I have read and understand the material in this handbook \_\_\_\_\_YES \_\_\_\_\_NO

Our policies have been developed to serve the best interests of the entire Promise Landing Farm community. Safety, confidentiality, respect for each other – human and equine – and the preservation of an optimal environment for beneficial adaptive riding are the primary reasons for strict adherence to these rules.

Individuals who are not able to perform their volunteer role, or maintain a reasonable level of commitment, or fail to observe the rules and procedures of the program will be given an opportunity to discuss any situation that is perceived to be a violation of Promise Landing Farm policies and may be provided with job reassignment.

However, Promise Landing Farm reserves the right to determine at its discretion that it may be in the best interest of the program to terminate a volunteer's involvement with the program.

I agree to follow the rules set forth by Promise Landing Farm for the safety of myself, the riders, horses, other program participants, and staff.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Did you find this Volunteer Training Manual helpful? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Is there anything you think should be covered more thoroughly in the manual? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Please return this sheet to the Volunteer Coordinator before starting your first volunteer shift.**

**Thank you!**