



Volunteer Orientation Manual

Equine Assisted Therapeutic Riding Ministry

Our mission at Hope Ranch is to *enrich people's lives through the use of nature, health, and horsemanship.*

Dear Volunteers,

In this manual you will find information pertinent to your work as a volunteer at Hope Retreat Ranch. This is meant to be a guide to your work as a volunteer for our equine assisted activities program and a supplement to orientation and training, not a substitute. These techniques were adopted from facilities all over the country that have been developed over time and we feel are, to date, the most effective for our purposes.

Although we are just now in the beginning stages of serving those with special needs with this ministry, we already realize that the most important element is that volunteers will be the strength of our program.

The volunteer experience offered at HR Ranch is as rewarding as it is unique. It is an opportunity to channel individual talents and skills into a variety of volunteer activities, work with horses, help those with disabilities, and make new friends.

Our desire is to have many experienced and compassionate volunteers that enjoy sharing their time and energy in building a premiere therapeutic riding center for disabled children in the OKC metro area. In volunteering, you contribute to the process of giving our participants one of life's most precious gifts – a feeling of self-worth, accomplishment and self-esteem.

For everyone's safety and enjoyment, please take the time to read through this handbook. The information included is vital for a safe and enjoyable experience. Please keep this for review.

We greatly appreciate your interest and time. We couldn't do it without you.
Many thanks,

Brandi Watts

Program Director

Volunteer Activities

Orientation and training are provided and required for all volunteer positions. Those that work directly with riders and/or horses are required to attend additional classes.

HR Ranch offers a variety of volunteer activities dependent upon your interests and abilities. You can volunteer as an individual or as part of a group. Service clubs, youth groups, school groups, church groups and other organizations are encouraged to participate in community service projects with us.

Below is a description of the volunteer positions needed to assist directly with horseback riding activities as well as examples of other activities you can help with that are not directly related to riding.

Volunteer Guidelines

- Arrive on time, sign volunteer time sheet and stay for the total time of your shift
- Commit to a regular day and time for the entire class duration in order to provide consistency to an individual client unless you volunteer as a floater/fill in
- Take a professional approach to training so that you are aware of and prepared for the responsibilities given to you and the performance expected
- Ask for help if you do not understand something or cannot perform your task
- Dress appropriately for your assignment (See section on recommended attire)
- Complete all required release forms prior to the start of sessions (i.e. Volunteer/Staff information and Health History, Emergency Medical, Onsite/Offsite Release) **ANNUALLY!**
- Maintain confidentiality and respect the privacy of all other volunteers, staff and clients
- Contact us if something prevents you from attending a session, call or text or leave a voicemail for your instructor as far in advance as possible so that a replacement can be found.
- At least two volunteers must be with any one client at any given time.
- All personal needs such as toileting or clothes changing may only be conducted by a parent/guardian or teaching assistant – NEVER a volunteer.
- Children 10-13 can volunteer but must be in direct supervision of an adult.
- Must be 14 or older to be considered for side walker or horse handler.
- Please refrain from offering food or other gifts to participants without permission as they may have medical conditions such as food allergies, diabetes, etc.
- Please do not perform a volunteer role you have not yet been trained for.
- If corrective actions need to be implemented to diffuse a potentially hazardous incident, be calm and send someone to direct the instructor's attention to the situation.

Confidentiality Policy

Any information in regards to the participants of HR Ranch including: riders, volunteers, and personnel shall remain privileged and confidential. This information may include, but is not limited to, any medical, social, referral, personal, and/or financial information. Information concerning students will be shared with volunteers on a need to know basis. Disclosure of any confidential information shall not be released to anyone not associated with HR Ranch. Volunteers must seek staff permission prior to taking any pictures or videos.

Volunteer and Guest Dismissal Policy

HR Ranch is very grateful for the time, energy, and resources our volunteers share with the program. We cannot succeed without you, however, there are several reasons that a volunteer would be disciplined or asked to leave the program. Examples include, but are not limited to the following:

- Violation of one of the policies included in Orientation Training and this manual, particularly:
 - Violation of the confidentiality of client records
 - Disrespecting a client or attempting to discipline a client or one of our horses
 - Violation of safety procedures
 - Absence from a shift without procuring a replacement or notification.
 - Presence at HR Ranch under the influence of alcohol or an illegal substance.
- Causing a conflict and/or arguing with an instructor, staff, or fellow volunteer during a session
- Unauthorized use of HR Ranch tack or horses or facilities

Should a volunteer face removal from the program as a result of one of the above offenses or for another reason, the volunteer shall receive notice of termination. The volunteer may request a review hearing by a 3 person review committee from the Board of Directors. Otherwise, any professional staff member, instructor or the Barn Manager may request removal of a volunteer from the program pending a board committee review if requested.

Non-Horsey Volunteer Opportunities

Please contact our Program Director if you are interested in any of these areas.

Office/Computer Help:

We can use help in the office with filing, thank you notes, data entry, etc.

Development Team:

This team will act as a sub-committee to HR Ranch's Board of Directors. It will help with the oversight, evaluate functionality of the therapeutic riding program, and make recommendations to the Board of Directors as to how we can make it the best program possible.

Public Relations/Marketing:

Submit periodic press releases as directed. Work to obtain more media coverage so HR Ranch can have higher community awareness. Help to update the website and periodically take pictures of new horses or special events. Each of these duties must be preapproved and authorized.

Fundraising/Special Events:

Interested individuals are welcome to join the fundraising committee and help the program to meet financial needs. The fundraising committee plans and executes the events done each year by contacting clubs that are interested in offering financial assistance, getting donations, contacting vendors and so on.

Grant Writing:

Experienced grant writers are needed to help identify foundations or grants with a potential for donating to the program, and to assist to write these grants.

Grounds/Maintenance:

HR Ranch is looking better but is in need of grounds/maintenance volunteers to do repairs, upkeep, and capital improvement projects. Occasionally, volunteers will be asked to help clean water buckets, clean tack, clean helmets, clean stalls, sweeping, unload and move hay, etc. This opportunity is also open to school and community groups. Volunteers must be at least 10-13 years of age and be in direct supervision of an adult.

Game Player:

This is one most exciting ways to volunteer. The game player is also a good stepping stone into the sidewalker position. Games are a vital part of the therapeutic process. These games will be helping them with motor skills, balance and flexibility. You are the rider's cheerleader, encouraging and challenging them all while having fun!

Horsey Volunteer Opportunities

Go-For:

For our interested volunteers who are between the ages of 12 and 14. We have work that includes helping getting the horses ready for classes. You can also assist parents with other children. You will also be needed to help with games and going for needed equipment that may have been forgotten for class.

Feeding and Watering and Mucking:

Volunteers are needed to feed horses, fill the water troughs, and muck the stalls even when we do not have lessons. This is typically a 30-60 minute time commitment, dependent on your availability. You will be trained in the specific needs of the duty you have volunteered for.

Grooming: (on days off)

Even though all of the horses require grooming before and after lessons (this will be done by other volunteers). The horses need additional care. This includes picking their feet, brushing their coat, combing/washing their mane and tail, and occasionally tending to minor cuts or wounds.

Side Walker:

Most students require a side walker while riding to ensure their optimal safety and comfort. This entails walking or jogging alongside the horse and rider for the duration of the class. A side walker's sole responsibility is for the safety of the rider, and to provide physical, verbal and emotional support for them at the direction of the instructor.

Horse Handler: (you must be recommended by staff or director for this position)

While leading a horse in a lesson, the handler's primarily responsibility is the horse. Handlers will be responsible for tacking out the horse for class. Some horses or riders require special pads, reins, or other gear to improve their comfort or performance. All of this will be indicated on the daily lesson roster. The horse should be ready at least 5 minutes prior to the next lesson.

To ensure consistency and the well being of the horses, volunteers must be open to handling the horses as directed by our staff. In order to be approved for this volunteer position additional mandatory training is required. Horse handlers must demonstrate their ability to lead a therapy horse at a walk or trot and be approved by the Program Director.

Session Leader: (you must be recommended by staff or director for this position)

Your responsibility is to ensure that the horses are groomed, correctly tacked and ready for the riding lesson on time, as well as working with volunteers who are interested in learning about grooming/tacking horses.

By managing all the details required to prepare for an adapted riding class, session leaders allow the instructors to focus on the riders and their learning objectives. This is a crucial part of providing safe, progressive and innovative instruction. Session leaders must be familiar with the rules and policies that govern HR Ranch's program and with riding equipment and its use. Leaders should also be organized and a good communicator.

Safety is our FIRST Priority

Parking:

Volunteers and clients arriving at HR Ranch will enter at 2320 S Sandwood Ave. Enter through the gate and follow the designated path.

- Parking is allowed along the south side of the south. No parking or driving in front of the buildings (west side).
- DO NOT under any circumstances park outside the fence on Sandwood or on SE 20th Street.

Phones:

If there is an emergency, and you are without a cell phone, there is a phone located in the ranch office behind the desk. Emergency numbers to call are posted on the wall by the phone, inside the classroom on the bulletin board, and in the barn on the tack room door.

Pets:

All pets are required to stay inside your vehicle, whether on a leash or not, unless an authorized service animal and you have received prior permission from HR Ranch.

Horses:

No running or shouting around the arena while sessions are in progress. No hand-feeding and giving treats to the horses or other farm animals.

Fire Extinguishers:

We have two fire extinguishers: one in the barn on the wall by the walk-through door, and one outside of the "Watering Hole" on the east side (round pen side). To operate a fire extinguisher remember "Pull, Aim, Squeeze, Sweep"

First Aid Kits:

Human First Aid Kit-is in the classroom under the bulletin board.

Equine First Aid supplies are located on the shelf in barn by the walk-through door.

Fire or Tornado Emergency:

- Dismount riders first. Side walkers escort them out of the arena. Instructor decides about horses.
- Evacuate the arena and facilities and gather at the North Fence for a head count (fence between house and arena).
- Instructor will decide the next course of action.

Weather Cancellations:

Occasionally, classes may need to be cancelled due to bad weather. No classes will be held if a tornado warning is in effect in the area. If the local news is calling for severe weather or rain please be sure to call **405-390-3754** to check if classes have been cancelled. We will be sure to have the answering machine updated with this information if we are not able to answer your call.

Medical Emergency or Occurrence with Injury:

- Alert the instructor, give details and follow instructor's direction
- If requested - call 911 – stating the directions to the ranch located by the phone in the ranch office, on bulletin board in classroom, and in the barn on tack room door. Stay on the line with 911 if possible.

Accident/Occurrence Report Forms:

Rider Incidents

In the case of an incident involving the fall of a rider from a horse or any mishap with a rider involving a bruise or cut, an Occurrence Report Form must be completed by the Instructor of the session involving that rider whether the session has ended or has not yet begun. Volunteers may be asked to provide additional information to aide in the completion of the form, but responsibility for completing the form lies with the instructor.

Staff/Volunteer Incidents

In the case of an incident involving a volunteer or staff member, whether due to a horse-related event or a fall or accident, an Occurrence Report Form must be signed by the individual who was hurt. Another volunteer or an available instructor may complete the form, but a completed form with the signature of the hurt individual is required unless that person is left unconscious or taken by ambulance from the property. Occurrence report forms are available in the file slots outside the ranch office.

Prohibited Personal Behavior and Items **Banned from property**

Cell Phones:

Cell phones are an important part of life today but can be a distraction at best and a safety hazard at worst for an equine program. ***No Phone Zone in or around the arena while students are mounted on horses.*** Everywhere else on HR Ranch campus cell phones must be turned off or put on vibrate.

Profanity :

- The use of profanity is strictly prohibited throughout HR Ranch's campus.

Tobacco Use:

- Smoking, smokeless tobacco products and E-cigs are strictly prohibited throughout HR Ranch's campus. Fire hazards related to hay, horses, wooden structures and pastures produce dire consequences!

Substance Abuse:

No alcohol is permitted on HR Ranch's premises. Use of controlled substances before or during sessions is strictly prohibited. A volunteer attempting to operate under the influence of alcohol or illegal or legal substances could pose a danger to our clients, our horses and other volunteers.

Fire Arms / Fireworks:

- No firearms or fireworks are permitted on HR Ranch's premises.

Recommended Attire for Volunteers

There are a few basic rules that volunteers need to follow concerning wearing apparel:

- Weather conditions will dictate that outer garments be comfortable. HR Ranch does not have extra gloves, jackets, socks or boots.
- Professionalism is the key. Clothes that are durable, neat, and clean are recommended. Clothing should be comfortable, not binding and easy to move in. Capped sleeved shirts are permitted but no tank tops. Shorts should be mid-thigh or longer.
- Dangling earrings, bracelets and necklaces should not be worn since they could become entangled in equipment and could also cause a distraction to the mount and/or rider.
- No perfumes or colognes. It could attract stinging insects.
- High heels, flip flops and sandals are not suitable for walking on the arena surface. Shoes should be stable and comfortable – no open spaces, open toes, and no straps. The recommended footwear is a hiking/walking or work shoe.

Personnel Roles

The Instructor:

All sessions run under the control of the instructor who is usually stationed in the center of the arena. Sessions are usually limited to four riders with a minimum of two volunteers per rider.

The instructor's duties and responsibilities include:

- Preparing the Lesson Plan
- Making decisions regarding equipment and how to conduct the class
- Briefing volunteers prior to the session
- Giving all instructions to both volunteers and riders during the session.
- Matching the rider with the horse and tack and checking tack
- Mounting and dismounting all riders
- Assigning volunteers to horses and riders
- Taking charge of all emergency situations

Granting the instructor absolute authority during sessions insures the safety of everyone involved in the program.

The Volunteer:

There are three (3) distinct parts of a session from the volunteer perspective:

1. Pre-Session
2. Session
3. Post - Session

SIDE WALKING

The sidewalker is responsible for the safety of the rider, both on and off the horse. The sidewalker needs to be aware of the rider at all times. Even when the rider is not mounted, the sidewalker should be conscious of the rider's safety. Horse skills are not required to perform this duty. The volunteer will be in close contact with the horse at all times. If a volunteer has concerns or fears but would like to volunteer in this capacity, please talk with a staff member and they will attempt to help you overcome any anxieties.

- There are two side walkers for each rider:
 - The **Interactive** sidewalker- left side
 - The **Supportive** sidewalker- right side
- When supporting a mounted rider, the sidewalker's duties are identical with a couple of exceptions. In the case of an emergency and when directed by the instructor the Interactive sidewalker is responsible for removing the rider from the horse.
- The Interactive Sidewalker is also the one to give instructions or prompts to the rider when needed.
- NEVER release your hold on the rider unless instructed to do so by the Instructor!

Pre- Session

General Duties :

- Go to volunteer room 30 minutes before class, sign-in, get name tag and check for assigned rider and duties. Help with arena set up if asked.
- Greet rider and family/care giver upon arrival. Take care of any concerns or questions prior to riding.
- Fit rider with helmet. Check helmet inside and out for dust, spiders, wear and tear on straps. Helmet should fit snugly. It should be centered on the riders head. Place helmet on rider and adjust chinstrap to fit firmly under chin. With helmet in proper position, adjust so that two fingers fit snugly between the strap and under riders chin.

Mounting- Interactive Sidewalker:

- Responsible for rider safety on the ground or while mounted in or out of the arena. Hold rider's hand if appropriate and always stand between rider and rear of horse.
- Take rider up to instructor for mounting the rider on the horse. If a wheelchair or other mobility aid is used take directions from the instructor regarding your role.
- Once the rider is securely mounted, Instructor will have the horse handler move the horse a couple of steps so you can move into position for a walk-on.

Mounting-Supportive Sidewalker:

- Stand 2-3 feet from mounting block/ramp to create an alley for the horse to enter for mounting
- Assist from the ground with the rider mount – face the horse's side, feet astride, hands raised in readiness to receive rider. Method and amount of assistance needed will vary with the rider. Assist in positioning the horse close to the ramp and standing steady.
- When rider is securely mounted, instructor approves, both sidewalkers are in position and leader is ready, rider will give the "walk-on" command.

Support Holds:

Take cues from the Instructor for the required hold from the following list:

- **Arm over thigh**- most common hold- sidewalker grips front of the saddle or surcingle with hand closest to the rider. Then the forearm rests gently on the rider's thigh. Be careful that the elbow doesn't accidentally dig into the rider's thigh or the horse.
- **Ankle Support**- This is the least restrictive form of support, allowing the rider to use all muscles to provide his or her own support. The sidewalker cups the rider's ankle to stabilize the rider's lower leg.

There are other holds that the instructor will demonstrate on an as needed basis.

Session

General Riding:

- ***Keep the rider centered on the horse!***
- If shifting occurs, ask the rider to shift their weight. If they don't or are unable to do so, then assist the rider in shifting back to center.
- Minimal re-centering can be done while walking.
- Major corrections of rider position may require a halt in the center of the arena.
 - Cue to leader to "whoa", if necessary to shift the rider.
 - Repositioning is most easily done using the hips or shoulders as control points.
 - The instructor will provide guidance, as needed, in positioning riders.

• **Emergency Dismount**

- If directed by the Instructor the Interactive sidewalker will do an emergency dismount of the rider in an emergency situation.
- Hold safety belt or grab rider around chest or waist, attempting to protect the head as you pull the rider off and slightly backward.
- A small child may be held, but a larger child or adult should be lowered to the arena floor and immediately move away from the horse. Be sure to keep your body between student and the horse.
- Instructor will give further directions related to the situation
- If there is an emergency- stay calm and stay with the rider.

• **Changing Sides**

- *This is to be done ONLY at a halt!*
- If either sidewalker needs to make a change , first alert the instructor, then go to the center of the arena. The Instructor will give direction on how this is to be done.
- The sidewalker who calls for the change releases hold on the rider after the game player or instructor has taken hold for them and will walk in front of the horse then replace the other sidewalker.

- Once the changing sidewalker has a hold on the rider, the other sidewalker walks in front of the horse to the other side and takes hold and replaces the person who has filled in.
- Make sure a conversation is taking place so that the rider is securely held by at least one sidewalker at all times during the switch.

- **Games**

- Sidewalkers should participate in games as directed by the instructor.
- DO NOT reach for stray balls, beanbags or other objects unless the instructor tells you to or they are about to injure your rider and you are in a position where you can continue to support your rider while deflecting the object.

Post Session

- After student is dismounted the sidewalkers are responsible for walking them back to their parent or caregiver.
- If asked please clear arena of games, cones and ground poles
- Return all equipment to storage area neatly. Spray helmets and return them to the tack room.
- Note any damaged equipment on the dry erase board in the barn.
- View the arena...Is equipment put away?
- **Log hours on chart before leaving.**

Horse Handler

Horse Handlers first responsibility is the horse. They need to be alert and aware of the horse's movement and behavior at all times, as well as staying tuned in to the rest of the team. They must be aware of any potential hazards around the arena and consider the sidewalkers by making sure there is enough room along the fence and around obstacles for them to pass.

Pre- Session

General Duties:

- Horse Handlers should arrive 45 minutes before the class. Sign in upon arrival and get name tag.
- Assist instructors in bringing up horses if asked
- Check white board in barn to see what horse you are assigned to.
- Groom horse – checking for any injuries or sensitivities (see grooming section)
- Inspect tack, Tack-up horse and tie to cross ties in isle of barn or in stall
- Inform instructor of any unusual behavior, mood changes or injuries to horse

Session

Leading:

- **General Guidelines**
 - Position your right hand 6 to 8 inches from the snap while your left hand carries the folded rope. NEVER coil the lead rope around you hand!
 - Do not let the horse crowd you with his feet, face or body or pass your shoulder when walking or trotting.
 - Walk beside the horse's head, about even with his eye, watching eye and ears for expressions of disposition.
 - Use voice, body language and pressure, in that order to cue the horse

- Inform your instructor promptly if there is an issue with the horse.
- Follow any decision by the instructor regarding how to proceed.
- Do not walk backwards except for the few steps you take backwards to line the horse at the mounting ramp/block.
- If there is an emergency stay calm and stay with your horse.
- Warm up horse in arena first without tack allowing the horse to look at things in the arena. Again horse will be walked around the arena after being tacked up.

Leading into mounting area:

- Handler will bring horse to mount area but halt approximately 10 feet from it.
- Handler will wait until instructor asks for the horse
- Handler will then lead the horse close to the ramp or block listening to instructor positioning cues. You will have to turn and walk backwards at the ramp to ensure horse moves slowly and is lining up correctly.
- Handler will still be facing horse. You will square the horse and then ask the horse to halt.
- Handler will stay facing horse until instructor has done all safety checks and rider is mounted safely.
- When instructor asks- handler will move horse up a couple of steps to let interactive sidewalker to get in place.
- Once sidewalkers are in place instructor will give the ok for a walk-on. Handler will face front and give rider time to ask the horse to walk-on before moving ahead.

Leading in class setting:

- Handle the horse in a manner that creates a safe environment for your team of rider and sidewalkers.
- Never release the horse unless instructed to do so.
- Follow the direction of the instructor regarding patterns, games, mounts and dismounts
- Leave a minimum of a truck space between you and the horses in front of and behind you when walking.
- To create space between you and another horse:

- **Circle** – make a large circle to the inside of the arena ending in an area that has enough space in front of and behind the horse you are leading.
- At halt, stand in front of the horse at 45 degrees, angling toward the horse's face, maintaining 6 to 8 inches slack in the lead.
- Ask the sidewalkers and rider if they are ready before walking on.
- If it is necessary to relax the horse, rub the side of the neck or cheek. Use quiet hands when close to the horse's face and talk in a calming voice.
- Stand on the side of the horse nearest games when they are being played so you can screen the horse from the action as needed.
- Halt to walk – Rider cues with “walk on”, then begin walking.
- Use short tugs instead of a continuous pull to keep a lazy horse moving
- Do not attempt to drag the horse be sure to use your voice
- Remember the horse has four legs so be careful to not make sharp turns. Tight turns and abrupt transitions will throw your rider off balance.
- Walk to halt – rider cues with “whoa!” and handler gradually slows walking speed to a halt.
- Instructor will dismount rider at the end of class.

Post Session:

- Remove and put away tack.
- Groom horse – noting any injuries that might have occurred in the session
- Tell the horse what a great therapist he or she is!
- Check with the instructor regarding where the horse needs to go:
 - If there is a session later that day, put the horse in its assigned stall.
 - If there is a session immediately following, tie horse to cross ties in isle or stall
 - If yours is the last session of the day, put the horse in the pasture if instructed by instructor.
- Fork horse apples from arena.
- **Log hours on chart before leaving.**

DISABILITIES SEEN IN THE HR Ranch Equine Assisted Therapeutic Riding Ministry

1. ATTENTION DEFICIT DISORDER: Inability to focus attention

Characteristics: May have difficulty following directions, may be overly active

Benefits: Stimulates attention span, group skills, builds confidence, opportunities to meet goals

2. AUTISM: A self-centered mental state from which reality tends to be excluded

Characteristics: Unresponsiveness to the presence of others; withdrawal from physical contact; severely delayed and disordered language; self-stimulating behaviors; unusual or special fears; insensitivity to pain, unawareness of real dangers; hyperactive, passive; unusual behaviors such as smelling/tasting/licking/mouthing all objects; ritualistic behaviors; developmentally delayed; unusual response to sounds; clumsiness; social withdrawal; resistance to change.

Benefits: Interaction in a group setting stimulates interest away from self and toward others and the horses. Postural and verbal stimulation.

3. CEREBAL PALSY: Brain damage occurring before, at, or shortly after birth. It is a nonprogressive motor disorder.

Types and Characteristics:

Spastic - hypertonicity with hyperactive stretch reflexes, muscle imbalances and equilibrium. Increased startle reflex and other pathological reflexes.

Athetoid – extensor muscle tension, worm-like movements, abnormal posturing and slow and deliberate speech

Ataxic – poor balance, difficulty with quick, fine movements and are often described as having a “rag doll” appearance.

Benefits: Normalization of tone, stimulation of postural and balance mechanisms, muscle strengthening and perceptual motor coordination.

Associated Problems: Seizures; hearing defects; visual defects; general sensory impairment; perceptual problems; communication problems; mental retardation; emotional disturbances; learning disabilities

4. **DEVELOPMENTAL DELAY:** A general term applied to children functioning two or more years below grade level.

Characteristics: Varied but can include slow physical, motor and social development

Benefits: Provides arena for success, opportunity for sport and recreation, stimulates body awareness.

5. **DOWN SYNDROME:** Condition in which a person is born with an extra chromosome resulting in mental retardation and developmental delay

Characteristics: Broad, flat face, slanted eyes, neck and hands may be board and short. Usually hypotonic, have hypermobile joints and tend to be shrot and slightly overweight. Prone to respiratory infections.

Benefits: Riding improves expressive and receptive language skills, gross and fine motor skills, balance, posture, muscle tone and coordination.

6. **EMOTIONAL DISABILITIES:** A congenital or acquired syndrome often compounded by learning or physical disabilities incorporating numerous other pathologies.

Characteristics: Trouble coping with everyday life situations and interpersonal relations. Behaviors such as short attention span, avoidance, aggression, autism, paranoia or schizophrenia may be exhibited.

Benefits: Increases feelings of self-confidence and self-awareness and provides appropriate social outlet.

7. **HEARING IMPAIRMENT:** Congenital or acquired hearing loss from mild to profound.

Characteristics: Communication difficulties – may use lip reading, finger spelling (manual alphabet) or sign language. Often phase out and have attention deficits.

Benefits: Stimulates self confidence, balance, posture and coordination. It also provides appropriate social outlets and interactions.

8. **LEARNING DISABILITIES:** Catch-all phrase for individuals who have problems processing, sequencing and problem solving, but who appear to otherwise normal intelligence skills.

Characteristics: Short attention span, easily frustrated, immature.

Benefits: Effects depend on the particular disorder. Stimulates attention span, group skills, cooperation, language skills, posture and coordination.

9. **MENTAL RETARDATION:** Lack of ability to learn and perform at normal and acceptable levels. Degree of retardation is referred to as educable, trainable, severe or profoundly retarded.

Characteristics: Developmentally delayed in all areas. Short attention span.

Benefits: Stimulates group activity skills, coordination, balance, posture, gross and fine motor skills and eye-hand coordination. Provides a structured learning environment.

10. **MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS (MS):** Progressive neurological disease with degeneration of spinal column tracts, resulting in scar formation.

Characteristics: Most commonly occurs in the 20 to 40 year range. It is progressive with periods of exacerbation and remissions. Fatigues easily. Symptoms include weakness, visual impairment, fatigue, loss of coordination and emotional sensitivity.

Benefits: Maintains and strengthens weak muscles and provides opportunities for emotional therapy.

11. **MUSCULAR DYSTROPHY (MD):** Deficiency in muscle nutrition with degeneration of skeletal muscle. Hereditary disease that affect mainly males.

Characteristics: Progressive muscular weakness, fatigues easily, sensitive to temperature extremes.

Benefits: Provides opportunity for group activity, may slow progressive loss of strength, stimulates postural and trunk alignment, and allows movement free of assistive devices.

12. **VISUAL IMPAIRMENT:** Moderate or total loss of sight

Characteristics: Insecure posture, lack of visual memory, anterior center of gravity, fearfulness, and developmental delay.

Benefits: Stimulates spatial awareness, proprioception, posture and coordination. Provides social outlet, structured risk taking and freedom of movement.