



Welcome to the Cloud Dancers Family!

We are delighted that you are considering sharing, or already have decided to share, your time, compassion, and talents with everyone at Cloud Dancers, especially our wonderful riders. Through your commitment to Cloud Dancers, you will engage in our mission of “Improving Lives with Every Ride.” This could even apply to your own life!

One of the first steps in having a successful volunteer experience with us, is to familiarize yourself with our Policies and Procedures in the attached Volunteer Handbook. Please read it carefully and let us know if you have any questions.

Your role as a volunteer is critical to the quality and very existence of Cloud Dancers’ programs. We will do our very best to provide the training, hands-on instruction, communication and support you need to be successful and enjoy your time with us. Through your work with our riders, horses, staff, and other volunteers you can expect to experience joy, camaraderie, love, care, compassion and, at times, tears and concern. You will also gain insight into yourself through these experiences and the positive impact you will have on our riders and their families.

We are excited to have you as part of our Volunteer Team. Be safe, enjoy being a part of our team, and have fun!

Best wishes,

*DeAnna Campbell*  
Board President



# Volunteer Handbook

2023

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[www.clouddancersthp.org](http://www.clouddancersthp.org)



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## Introduction to Cloud Dancers Therapeutic Horsemanship

The mission of Cloud Dancers is to provide equine-assisted activities to individuals with physical, cognitive, emotional, and/or social needs through innovative horseback riding and ground programs.

Our motto is “Improving Lives with Every Ride!”

Established in 1982, Cloud Dancers became a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization in 1986 and has been a member of the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship, International (PATH) since 1999.

Cloud Dancers adheres to the highest industry standards and instruction with emphasis on the safety of its riders, horses, staff and volunteers, and on the quality of its equine-assisted activities and therapies. Our instructors are all PATH-certified with fun, goal setting, and learning as significant parts of our programs.

Three part-time employees—two Instructors and a Program Coordinator--and a Volunteer Coordinator work together on Cloud Dancers’ programs and directly with our riders, volunteers and horses. A volunteer Board of Directors with expertise in the areas of non-profit and project management, finance, human resources and training, development, the law, and special needs conducts the remainder of Cloud Dancers’ operational work. In addition, the Board does strategic planning, goal setting, policy development, staff and financial oversight, and resource development.

But it is Cloud Dancers’ terrific volunteers who make it all happen. In 2022 a total of 7,427 volunteer hours resulted in helping our riders have safe and productive lessons, feeding and caring for our horses, providing maintenance, repairs and beautification of the property, administrating programs, recruiting, and participating in on- and off-site special events.



## What is Therapeutic Horsemanship?

Therapeutic horsemanship uses activities with horses for the purpose of contributing positively to the cognitive, physical, emotional and social well-being of individuals with disabilities. It includes riding and groundwork as well as hands-on learning about tack and other equipment, care and grooming of horses, and more. This is different from hippotherapy, which is the term used to describe incorporating equine partners into speech/language therapy, occupational therapy, and physical therapy.

Instructors design and implement activities with horses that address cognitive, behavioral, psychological and physical goals, as well as teach skills in riding and groundwork. Personal pride and improved self-esteem come from accomplishing new tasks and learning new skills. The pure enjoyment of the horse-human bond brings joy and pleasure along with new friendships and relationships.

Therapeutic horsemanship works in a number of different ways. The gait of the horse closely simulates the movement of the human pelvis and is a valuable tool in promoting many physical benefits such as increased circulation, relaxation of tight muscles, strengthening of weak muscles, increase in pelvic and trunk mobility, development of balance and coordination and improvement in posture. Group lessons promote socialization and increased vocalization and attention span.

Individuals with disabilities who may respond positively to therapeutic riding include people with Down Syndrome, Autism, MS, paralysis, amputations, ADD, ADHD, developmental delays, Cerebral Palsy, brain injuries, strokes, drug or alcohol abuse, depression, hearing and seeing impairments and other disabilities. Instructors develop goals for riders whose ages range from 5 years to seniors, with input from them and/or parents/guardians for developing core and muscle strength, increasing physical flexibility and balance, improving fine motor skills, enhancing communication and listening skills and more.

Teens and adults will experience riding in trail courses and dressage patterns. Younger riders may improve their fine motor skills by retrieving stuffed animals from corral fences and barrels and taking them back to the “zoo” in the center of the arena while on horseback. Games with colors and shapes may enhance communication and listening skills. Playing “red light-green light” on horseback focuses on following directions. Guiding a horse with heads up and eyes in the direction the rider wants to go often improves posture and core strength.

Equine Assisted Learning and Psychotherapy (EAL/EAP) programs partner with local community groups to provide mental health learning for personal growth, as well as therapy for those who may be experiencing suicidal ideations, depression, anxiety, and PTSD, among others. The programs are co-facilitated by a professional, licensed counselor with extensive EAP/EAL experience and a PATH International Certified Equine Specialist in Mental Health and Learning.



## Volunteer Opportunities

### Horse Leader

The primary role of the horse leader during a lesson is to stay focused on the horse at all times in order to “read” its behavior, help the horse follow the rider’s guidance, and assist in ensuring the safety of the rider and side walkers.

Skills Needed:

- Experience with horse handling helpful but not necessary
- Ability to “read” horses with knowledge and confidence to calmly prevent unexpected movements
- Good listening skills
- Good physical condition

Responsibilities may also include the following:

- Meet and greet riders and families
- Retrieve horses from stalls or turnout
- Assist in grooming and saddling horses
- Warm up horses in arena prior to lesson
- Lead horses during lesson, walking or occasionally jogging, and maintaining safe spacing and appropriate speed
- Assist with untacking
- Return the horses to stalls or turnout
- Assist with setting up and returning props
- Proper procedure for horse handling for an emergency dismount

### Side Walker

The primary role of side walkers is to ensure the rider’s safety and position in the saddle, and to assist them with the activities of the lesson and Instructor’s directions. There may be one or two side walkers, depending on the rider’s abilities.

Skills needed:

- Good physical condition
- Ability to hold arm slightly raised and out to the side for up to 30 minutes to provide support to rider

- Flexibility, patience, adaptability to change quickly
- Comfortable working with individuals with disabilities and having physical contact with individual and horse
- Ability to perform an emergency dismount

Responsibilities may also include the following:

- Meet and greet rider and families
- Assist leaders and riders in grooming and saddling horse
- Assist rider in mounting and dismounting horse as directed by Instructor
- Assist rider in following Instructor's directions by repeating directions or redirecting their attention
- Encourage and praise the rider. Smile!
- Walk alongside rider during lesson using prescribed hold method
- Provide support to rider as needed
- Assist with setting up and returning props

**If you prefer not to work directly with riders or horses during lessons, there are many other volunteer opportunities, including:**

**Feeding and care of our beloved horses** is very important and requires that you be in good physical condition, have some experience with horse handling (training is available), and are good at paying attention to detail.

**Interpreters** with skills in Spanish and sign language are sometimes needed

**Special Events** (Planning, coordinating, providing activities for children with disabilities)

**Marketing** (Photography, videography, stories/newsletters; social media; graphic design; outreach, committee work)

**Administrative support** (Excel, data entry, Power Point, Bookkeeping, web management)

**Resource Development** (Grant writing, donate, solicit donations, committee work)

**Facility Improvements** (Building and grounds maintenance)

If you decide to volunteer, we will give you paperwork to complete and advise you how to complete your online background check. After we have collected your paperwork, all prospective volunteers will attend a one-hour **Getting Acquainted Session** that includes observation of a riding lesson, basic information about volunteering with Cloud Dancers, and an opportunity to ask any questions you may have.

We will then schedule lesson volunteers for **Basic Lesson Training 101** at which you will have more hands-on experience and training. We will have additional training sessions throughout the year to refresh and enhance your skills and provide an opportunity to share any questions or concerns.

## Tips for Working with Riders with Disabilities

Every person is an individual who wants and deserves to be treated with understanding, whether they have a disability or not. Each rider has their own unique personality and rate and style of learning. Cloud Dancers encourages our staff and volunteers to always look beyond the disability into the person, aiming to provide them with a warm and favorable environment in which to learn and grow. Please do not refer to individuals with disabilities as disabled, handicapped or crippled. Instead, it is appropriate to refer to them as a person with a disability, for example, we would say “a person with a visual impairment.” We do not discuss riders’ medical issues.

Being around someone with a disability, especially if it is profound, may be a new experience for you. Allow yourself time to get used to being with the person and get to know them. Cloud Dancers encourages consistency by pairing riders with volunteers through each lesson session to promote this, and you will find that getting to know the rider can be extremely rewarding.

Here are a few suggestions for creating a positive relationship with a rider:

- Be yourself.
- Relax. Let the rider put you at ease if you do not know what to say.
- Explore mutual interests in a friendly way. For starters, talk about the horse and whether the person has ridden before.
- When conversing with the rider or the parent/caregiver near the rider, speak directly to the rider or include them in the conversation. They may not be able to speak, or even appear to be listening, but they appreciate the consideration.
- Before and after lessons, use conversation and social behavior that you might use in any new situation. Riders may enjoy discussing things such as TV shows, school, movies, sports, foods, and other things we are all interested in.
- When working with the rider, it’s important to respect their independence and allow them do as much as they are able, within the context of the Instructor’s directions for each activity and the information the Instructor provides you about the rider’s needs. Don’t overwhelm them with help or insist upon helping when they are managing alone. When a person is trying to increase their physical ability, effort is necessary. Stepping in to help them too quickly may hinder their efforts.
- Be patient. Appreciate what the rider can do. Offer to help if necessary but request what kind of assistance they would like and be considerate of the extra time it may take them to accomplish or respond to something.
- If you have difficulty understanding what the rider says, it’s okay to say "I'm sorry, I didn't understand you. Would you say it again?"
- Be sensitive to separating a rider from a wheelchair, crutches, or braces unless asked.
- Remember to preserve each individual’s right to confidentiality at all times.



## Tips for Working Around Horses

Working around horses, inside or outside the arena, or in the barn or stall area involves risk. Even the well-trained horse is subject to its instinctive fight or flight responses. Horses are large, move quickly and can be dangerous to you or our riders if we don't respond appropriately.

For safety reasons and for the wellbeing of our horses, please follow these guidelines:

- Be alert and safety-conscious at all times.
- Be kind and gentle. Rough treatment of horses or any other animals on Cloud Dancers property will not be tolerated.
- Speak to horses to alert them to your presence and to avoid startling them when approaching or walking nearby.
- Approach horses from the side, to avoid their "blind" spots (directly in front of and behind them). Touch them first on the neck or shoulder, with a gentle stroking motion rather than patting them.
- Alert horses that you're going behind them by keeping your hand on their hindquarters while walking around them.
- Do not hand feed horses as this may cause them to become nippy. Our horses are on specialized diets, so please do not give them any treats.
- Do not feed or handle the other horses boarded on Cloud Dancers' property.
- Close all gates after entering or exiting stalls or arena.
- Use a soft voice and avoid loud noises.
- Do not use your cell phone to call or text around horses or during a lesson. Please turn off your cell phone or put it on silent. If you have an emergency and must make a call or text, please notify the Instructor so they can find a replacement for you.



## Cloud Dancers' Commitment to You

Cloud Dancers could not accomplish our goal of “Improving Lives with Every Ride” without the loyalty, compassion, care and expertise of our volunteers. In other words, you are vital to Cloud Dancers’ existence and the success of our programs. All of us must work together to:

- Ensure the safety of our riders, staff, volunteers, and horses.
- Share our care and compassion with riders and families.
- Provide our riders with fun, therapeutic activities with horses that instill confidence and self-esteem, develop or enhance life and cognitive skills, improve their balance, strength and flexibility, among many other benefits. Make a positive difference in someone’s life and in our own.

In recognition of all that you do as a volunteer, Cloud Dancers will:

- Provide you with the time, training, guidance and support you need to enable you to fulfill your volunteer role effectively.
- Be attentive to your needs and concerns and provide feedback on your participation.
- Communicate with you in clear and timely terms, verbally, electronically and in person regarding all aspects of your volunteer role.
- Keep you up to date on current Cloud Dancer issues, activities and events through our website, Facebook and Instagram pages, emails, newsletters and meetings.
- Provide ongoing appreciation for your time and talent, including an annual appreciation event.
- Provide a positive, caring learning environment in which you benefit as much as our riders.
- Give you a Cloud Dancers’ t-shirt upon completion of your first eight-week session (other Cloud Dancers’ apparel may be available at reduced cost).

## Your Commitment to Cloud Dancers

If you decide to volunteer with Cloud Dancers, we will expect you to:

- Support and follow Cloud Dancers' mission, goals, policies and procedures.
- Sign up for full 8-week sessions whenever possible and arrive on time for your scheduled lesson.
- Communicate in a timely manner with the Volunteer Coordinator if you are unable to attend your scheduled lesson or non-lesson activity.
- Be open to substituting for another volunteer who cannot make their scheduled lesson.
- Record your lesson volunteer hours on the clipboard in the tack room and your feeder hours on the Sign-in sheet in the feed room (Other volunteers report weekly hours to the appropriate staff member.)
- Be polite, respectful, helpful and friendly with riders, families, guests, staff, and other volunteers.
- Be kind, gentle and respectful of the horses and other animals on Cloud Dancers' property.
- Follow our safety guidelines and report any concerns immediately.
- Attend required training for your position.
- Maintain a clean, neat, professional appearance relative to your volunteer position.
- Communicate ideas, suggestions or concerns to the Volunteer Coordinator, an Instructor, the Equine & Facilities Manager, or appropriate staff or Board member.
- Adhere to our confidentiality policy as outlined below under Policies and Procedures.
- Refrain from giving out medical or legal advice and refer any questions to an Instructor or the Volunteer Coordinator.
- Refer any visitors to our Equine & Facilities Manager or a Board member who may be on site to meet that individual, and not make any comments to the media on behalf of Cloud Dancers.
- Hold Cloud Dancers harmless in case of accident, injury, illness or theft/damage to personal property on Cloud Dancers' premises.
- Agree to be photographed while volunteering and allow Cloud Dancers to use your image for promotional purposes (unless you have opted out of having your photo taken on your volunteer paperwork).



## Cloud Dancers' Policies and Procedures

### **Attendance**

Cloud Dancers depends on our volunteers to attend lessons and other activities they've signed up for, and to arrive promptly. If you must cancel your scheduled lesson or non-lesson activity, contact the Volunteer Coordinator as soon as possible so they have time to find a replacement volunteer (or contact the appropriate person if you volunteer in a non-lesson area. Be aware that a no-show can result in the lesson being cancelled.

### **Background Checks**

For everyone's safety and peace of mind, all staff and volunteers, including Board members, are required to successfully pass a background check prior to starting work or volunteering.

### **Cell Phones**

Due to the sensitive nature of horses and some riders to sudden sounds and the need for attention to our riders, cell phones should be silenced during lessons. Cell phone usage is not appropriate while volunteering. If there is an emergency consult with your instructor. Taking photos with your cell phone is not permitted during lessons.

### **Change of Personal Information**

Report any change in your name, address, telephone number, e-mail address, emergency contact, or medical conditions relevant to your volunteer work to the Volunteer Coordinator. You will be required to renew your application annually in order to continue volunteering with us.

### **Visitors and Guests**

Anyone working with our horses or riders must be Cloud Dancers staff or volunteers. Invited guests, friends, or relatives, may observe lessons from our Visitors Viewing Area, but cannot participate and should not stand at the arena rail. Personal dogs are not allowed on Cloud Dancers' property although animals who live on the property may be present.

### **Communication and Concerns**

Cloud Dancers is committed to open, honest, and respectful communication among its Board members, staff, and volunteers. Volunteers who have concerns about their work environment, staff or other volunteers should first seek guidance from the Volunteer Coordinator. If the situation is not resolved, you may discuss your concerns with an Instructor, the Equine & Facilities Manager, the Program Coordinator, or the Board member who chairs the Program Committee.

### **Confidentiality**

Instructors do not discuss the medical conditions of our riders with volunteers, unless certain information is required to do their job or safeguard a rider. This information must be kept Confidential out of respect for our riders and their families.

### **Covid Precautions**

Cloud Dancers follows the current State and CDC guidelines for Covid precautions. However, we cannot guarantee social distancing with a rider or other volunteers when support or assistance is needed to mount/dismount, to balance or sit upright on a horse, if bodily fluid from the rider's facial area is present, or in cases of emergencies or other unforeseen circumstances.

### **Dress and Weather Considerations**

All staff and volunteers should maintain a neat, clean and professional appearance appropriate to our activities and environment. Whenever possible, wear your Cloud Dancer's t-shirt or other Cloud Dancer apparel. Anyone working around the horses should wear closed shoes and long pants, capri pants, or long shorts. Avoid wearing jewelry, especially dangling earrings or necklaces, and strong-smelling perfume. Long hair should be tied back. Dress appropriately for the weather which can be unpredictable. Be prepared with a jacket, gloves and hat in the cooler months and with cooling neck scarfs and hats in the warmer months. Using sunscreen and drinking water are strongly recommended, especially in summer months.

### **Food and Beverages**

Staff and volunteers are welcome to bring snacks and beverages to be consumed between lessons, but they are not to be taken into the arena and should not be consumed near the horses or in the presence of riders. Perishables may be stored in the refrigerator in the office.

### **Parking**

Parking on the ditch road outside the property gate is not allowed. Parking areas closest to the arena are reserved for riders with limited mobility. Volunteers may park inside the property gate in areas closest to the office.

### **Personal Belongings**

Lock personal belongings in your car out of sight and only carry personal items that fit into your pockets.

### **Recording your Volunteer Hours**

Remember to sign in and out each time you volunteer. Documented volunteer hours helps Cloud Dancers when applying for grants or other funding.

### **Safety, Injuries, and First Aid**

Immediately report any safety hazards, accidents, injuries or suspicious strangers anywhere on or around Cloud Dancers' property (including any you may sustain while volunteering) to the Volunteer Coordinator, an Instructor, or the Equine & Facilities Manager. All accidents and injuries require an Accident Report. For minor situations, first aid supplies (as well as fire extinguishers) are available in the barn and the office. If medical care is necessary, we will contact the injured person's emergency contact to transport them to an urgent care location. In more severe cases, we will call 911. Cloud Dancers has some accident insurance coverage which is secondary to your personal insurance. Contact the Board Program Committee Chair for more information. Horse injuries or health concerns must be immediately brought to the attention of an Instructor, the Volunteer Coordinator, or the Equine & Facilities Manager.

**Smoking, Alcohol and Drug Use**

Smoking is not allowed on Cloud Dancers' property or at Cloud Dancers' events and the use of alcohol or drugs is not allowed on Cloud Dancers' property.

**Firearms and Concealed Weapons**

Firearms and concealed weapons are not allowed on Cloud Dancers' property or at our events.

**Social Media**

Anyone using social media who identifies themselves as associated with Cloud Dancers must clearly state that their views are theirs alone and do not reflect those of Cloud Dancers or anyone else associated with Cloud Dancers. Cloud Dancers' logo and other images or photos taken at Cloud Dancers may not be used without permission, and information about Cloud Dancers or anyone associated with Cloud Dancers including our riders may not be shared without permission.

**Sexual Harassment**

Sexual harassment, including making unwelcome sexual advances, seeking favors or engaging in any other unwelcome verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature, will not be tolerated. Any behavior or language with sexual overtones, whether or not considered sexual harassment, is not appropriate.

**Non-Discrimination**

Cloud Dancers does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, creed, gender, gender expression, age, national origin or ancestry, disability, marital status, sexual orientation, or military status in any of its activities or operations. These activities include, but are not limited to staff, volunteers, vendors, or provision of services. We are committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment for all of our staff, volunteers, contractors, riders, donors and vendors.

**Equal Opportunity Employer**

Cloud Dancers does not discriminate and will take measures to ensure against discrimination in employment, recruitment, advertisements for employment, compensation, termination, promotions, transfers and other conditions of employment against any employee or job applicant or volunteer on the bases of race, color, gender, national origin, age, religion, creed, disability, veteran's status, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.



## Other Ways to Support Cloud Dancers

### **Testimonials**

We love to share with our supporters how their donations impact the many benefits of the horse-human bond and how lives are changed through the work you do as a volunteer. Feel free to send an Instructor, our Volunteer Coordinator or Program Coordinator an e-mail about a particularly touching moment with a rider or their family member; share the excitement of an accomplishment or a fun time, a learning or emotional moment; or provide us with stories that touch your heart and mind and bring our impact on folks with disabilities to life for others to experience. We want to share those accomplishments which may be simple to us, but are so special and significant to the riders and their families.

### **Donations**

Cloud Dancers is a non-profit organization that relies primarily on grants, donations from individuals and businesses, and fundraising events for our income. We do not receive any city, state or federal funding. Your donation of time and expertise is very much appreciated, but we hope that as you experience the tremendous difference we make in the lives of individuals with disabilities, you may also become one of our loyal donors. You can make one-time donations at any time, including those in memory or honor of a loved one or friend. Monthly donations of even \$5 can make a big difference in our ability to meet ongoing expenses. Peer-to-peer fundraising is another way of sharing the importance of what you and Cloud Dancers do for our riders and their families.

Cloud Dancers normally does one key fundraising event a year. All volunteers, regardless of their position, are encouraged to participate in putting on these events and involve their families and friends, which may result peer-to-peer fundraising as well as lots of fun.

### **In-kind donations**

Supplies for our horses, riders, or office are always appreciated.

### **Shop**

Shop at Smiths and designate Cloud Dancers as the recipient of a percentage of your purchases.



## Contact Information

### Staff

Karen Molony, Head Instructor, Equine & Facilities Manager	505-235-8358 karen.cloudancersth@gmail.com
Makenna Hulett, Instructor	Makenna.cloudancersth@gmail.com
Louisa Roberts, Program Coordinator	505-926-1425 programs.cloudancersth@gmail.com
Sandy LaBarbera, Volunteer Coordinator	224-374-4144 volunteer.cloudancersth@gmail.com

### Board of Directors

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