



VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK

2027 EDITION

VOLUNTEER MISSION

To develop a dependable team of Christ-centered, safety-minded, compassionate, trained volunteers who serve participants, care well for horses, support MWH leaders, and help create meaningful experiences in which real horses, real relationships, and real growth can flourish.

“Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” • 1 Corinthians 10:31



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Welcome to Mentoring with Horses

Thank you for choosing to serve alongside us.

Dear Volunteer,

Welcome to Mentoring with Horses LLC (MWH). We are grateful that you are considering—or have chosen—to invest your time, abilities, compassion, and presence in the young people and horses entrusted to our care.

MWH is a Christ-centered equine-assisted mentoring organization in Greeneville, Tennessee. We combine horses, Christian values, Scripture, intentional mentoring, and experiential learning to help young people grow in wisdom, confidence, relational health, and practical life skills. Our work is relationship-first: horses are not props, and participants are not projects. Both deserve patience, dignity, respect, appropriate boundaries, and thoughtful care.

Volunteers make it possible for MWH to serve safely and personally. Depending on your role, you may help prepare the facility, support horse handling, assist with participant activities, provide hospitality, help with administrative or outreach work, or use a specialized skill. Whatever the assignment, the same standard applies: serve faithfully, follow MWH direction, protect confidentiality, put safety first, and help preserve a calm, encouraging environment.

A NOTE ABOUT THIS HANDBOOK

This handbook establishes MWH's general volunteer expectations and operating standards. It does not replace role-specific training, session instructions, emergency procedures, insurance requirements, or directions given by the MWH leader in charge. MWH may revise policies and volunteer assignments as programs, safety needs, insurance requirements, or operations change.

With appreciation,

Victor & Helen Mathis

Mentoring with Horses LLC



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Our Foundation

Who we are, why we serve, and what makes MWH distinctive.

Mission

To help young people grow in wisdom, confidence, relational health, and practical life skills by combining Christian discipleship, intentional mentoring, and experiential learning with horses.

Vision

A growing East Tennessee community in which young people encounter Christ-centered mentoring, experience meaningful connection with horses, and develop the relational and emotional skills needed to navigate life and adulthood well.

Core Promise

MWH does not simply put young people around horses. We intentionally use horse-human interaction as a context for mentoring, reflection, Scripture, relational learning, and practical skill development.

CHRIST-CENTERED	Biblical truth, prayer, grace, service, and the example of Jesus shape our ministry culture.
RELATIONSHIP-FIRST	We value authentic connection with participants, families, volunteers, and horses.
SAFETY-MINDED	Physical and emotional safety guide decisions, even when that means changing or stopping an activity.
HORSE-RESPECTING	Horse welfare, suitability, workload, rest, behavior, and choice matter.
PARTICIPANT-DIGNIFYING	We meet people with respect, avoid labels and assumptions, and encourage appropriate independence.
TEACHABLE & ACCOUNTABLE	Volunteers receive directions, ask questions, report concerns, and stay within their assigned role.

OUR BRAND MESSAGE

Real horses. Real relationships. Real growth. MWH helps young people discover biblical and relational truths through meaningful experiences with horses—and carry those lessons into everyday life.



Programs Volunteers May Support

MWH programs are mentoring and experiential-learning experiences—not riding lessons or trail-riding services.

Discipleship with Horses (DWH)

DWH is MWH's flagship 20-session youth mentoring program: 10 weekly sessions in the Spring and 10 weekly sessions in the Fall. The repeatable framework is Welcome → Scripture/Theme → Horse Experience → Reflection → Life Application → Closing. Life-skill themes include communication, trust, boundaries, leadership, empathy, emotional awareness, resilience, cooperation, wisdom, and healthier relationships.

Serenity Horse Encounters (SHE)

SHE is a single fixed 90-minute introductory experience using safe, guided, relational interaction with horses. Typical elements include a safety discussion, meeting the herd, grooming for relationship and connection, leading activities, an obstacle experience, an appropriately supervised faith-trust activity when offered, reflection, and Q&A.

Other MWH Programs

MWH may also operate or develop other equine-assisted mentoring or learning programs. Current website offerings include HEART (Horses Empowering Autistic Resilience Together) and Path to Freedom (PTF). Some programs may be paused, limited, referral-based, or subject to additional training and participant criteria. Volunteers serve only in programs and roles for which they have been approved.

IMPORTANT ROLE BOUNDARY

MWH volunteers do not diagnose, provide psychotherapy, medical treatment, professional counseling, or independent spiritual counseling on behalf of MWH. Volunteers support the approved program plan and refer participant questions or concerns beyond their role to MWH leadership.



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Becoming an MWH Volunteer

Dependability begins before the first session.

1. Application / Interest — Tell us about your interests, availability, experience with youth, horses, ministry, administration, or other relevant skills.
2. Conversation & Fit — MWH leadership may interview prospective volunteers and determine where a person's abilities, temperament, availability, and experience fit best.
3. Screening — Volunteers may be required to provide references, identification, consent to background screening, driving information for driving roles, or other information appropriate to the assignment and insurance requirements.
4. Orientation — Review MWH mission, participant dignity, confidentiality, boundaries, property expectations, emergency communication, and this handbook.
5. Role-Specific Training — Complete horse-handling, participant-support, facility, administrative, or other training required for the assignment.
6. Approval — Do not assume a role, handle a horse, supervise a participant, transport anyone, or access restricted areas until specifically approved.
7. Ongoing Training — Attend refreshers, debriefs, safety updates, and additional training when requested.

General Qualifications

- Reliable, respectful, teachable, and able to follow directions promptly.
- Supportive of MWH's Christ-centered mission and willing to conduct oneself consistently with it while serving.
- Emotionally and physically able to perform the assigned role safely.
- Willing to maintain confidentiality and appropriate boundaries.
- For horse-facing roles: able to demonstrate the horse knowledge and practical skills required by MWH.
- For youth-facing roles: able to interact patiently, appropriately, and without attempting to become a therapist, parent substitute, or private counselor.

VOLUNTEER STATUS

Volunteer service is unpaid and does not create an employment relationship, guarantee a particular assignment or schedule, or entitle a volunteer to compensation or benefits. MWH may change, suspend, or end a volunteer assignment when necessary for safety, program quality, conduct, attendance, fit, or operational needs.



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Volunteer Roles

Every role matters; not every volunteer performs every role.

PROGRAM SUPPORT	Assist with setup, materials, participant flow, activities, cleanup, and other tasks under the session leader's direction.
HORSE HANDLER / LEADER	Prepare, halter, lead, position, and manage an assigned horse only after MWH horse-handling approval.
PARTICIPANT SUPPORT	Provide encouragement, activity assistance, and safety awareness as directed; promote independence rather than doing tasks for participants.
FACILITY / HERD SUPPORT	Assist with approved barn, arena, equipment, water, manure, grounds, or horse-care tasks under MWH direction.
HOSPITALITY	Help welcome families, organize check-in, prepare water/materials, and support a warm, orderly environment.
ADMIN / OUTREACH	Assist with approved office tasks, flyers, data entry, partner outreach, events, or communication while protecting confidential information.
SPECIALIZED SKILLS	Photography, videography, marketing, carpentry, grant support, equine expertise, technology, or other skills when specifically requested and supervised.

Chain of Responsibility

The designated MWH session leader is in charge of the program environment. Volunteers should not contradict instructions in front of participants, independently alter an activity, introduce a new horse exercise, or give directions outside their role. Questions, observations, and ideas are welcome—bring them to the leader at an appropriate time.

WHEN IN DOUBT

Stop, create space, and ask the MWH leader. A volunteer is never expected to continue an activity that feels unsafe or exceeds the volunteer's training.

Code of Conduct & Participant Boundaries

Warm, caring relationships require clear boundaries.

- Treat every participant, parent/guardian, volunteer, staff member, visitor, and horse with dignity and respect.
- Use calm, appropriate language. No bullying, humiliation, threats, harassment, discrimination, hazing, sexualized comments, profanity directed at others, or demeaning jokes.
- Do not use corporal punishment, intimidation, restraint, or force except an immediate protective action reasonably necessary to prevent imminent injury and consistent with training.
- Do not pursue romantic, sexual, exploitative, or otherwise inappropriate relationships with participants.
- Do not exchange private or secret communications with minor participants. Use MWH-approved communication channels and include a parent/guardian or MWH leader when appropriate.
- Do not give a participant gifts, money, medication, food, rides, or off-site invitations without MWH leadership approval and, when applicable, parent/guardian permission.
- Do not photograph, record, post, tag, identify, or tell a participant's story unless MWH has confirmed appropriate permission and specifically authorized the use.
- Do not connect with minor participants through personal social-media accounts for the purpose of private messaging or relationship-building outside MWH.
- Never use alcohol, cannabis, illegal drugs, or impairing substances while volunteering or arrive impaired.
- Do not possess weapons while serving except as expressly authorized by MWH and lawful policy.
- Do not smoke or vape around participants, horses, barns, hay, arenas, or program areas.
- Do not proselytize beyond the approved Christ-centered program framework, pressure participants to disclose private spiritual matters, or present personal theological opinions as MWH policy.

ONE-ON-ONE SITUATIONS

Avoid isolated, unobservable situations with a minor participant whenever reasonably possible. Conduct interactions in open, observable program spaces and follow MWH's current supervision plan. Immediately report any boundary concern to MWH leadership.



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Confidentiality, Privacy & Safeguarding

Trust is part of safety.

During service, volunteers may learn a participant's name, family circumstances, health or ability information, personal struggles, spiritual concerns, behavior patterns, or other private information. Access only what you need for your assigned role and keep it confidential.

- Do not discuss participant information with friends, family, other participants, visitors, or volunteers who do not need the information.
- Do not post participant names, diagnoses, circumstances, photos, videos, schedules, or stories online.
- Do not remove participant records, screenshots, forms, contact lists, or confidential notes from approved systems or locations.
- Do not promise a participant absolute secrecy. Safety concerns must be shared with MWH leadership.
- If a participant discloses abuse, neglect, exploitation, self-harm, suicidal thoughts, threats, serious medical concerns, or danger to self or others: remain calm, listen without interrogating, do not investigate, and immediately notify the MWH leader in charge.
- Preserve the participant's dignity. Share safety information only with the people who need it to respond appropriately.

SAFETY OVERRIDES SECRECY

Confidentiality does not prevent a volunteer from reporting information necessary to protect a participant, volunteer, visitor, or horse. MWH leadership will determine and make required notifications or reports consistent with applicable law and policy.

Horse & Facility Safety

Horses are sensitive, powerful animals. Safety depends on attention, training, and respect.

- Enter horse areas only when authorized for your role. Do not enter an enclosure with loose horses unless trained and approved to do so.
- Only approved persons may catch, halter, lead, tie, groom, tack, mount, or otherwise manage program horses.
- Approach calmly where the horse can see and hear you. Avoid sudden movements, running, shouting, rough play, and crowding.
- Maintain safe spacing between horses and people. Never stand directly behind a horse, wrap a lead rope around a hand or body part, or place yourself where you can be pinned.
- Do not sit, kneel, or lie on the ground close to a horse.
- Do not hand-feed treats or change feed, supplements, medication, tack, or equipment unless specifically directed.
- Watch the horse continuously for changes in posture, ears, eyes, breathing, tension, movement, avoidance, fatigue, lameness, or other signs of discomfort.
- Respect a horse's need for rest and space. A horse may be removed from an activity at any time by MWH leadership.
- Keep gates, latches, doors, equipment, and pathways secured as directed. Report broken equipment, fencing, footing hazards, spills, sharp objects, or unsafe conditions immediately.
- No dogs or other personal animals on program property unless expressly approved.
- Phones should be silent and put away during active horse/participant duties except for authorized program or emergency use.

Mounted Activities

MWH is not a riding-lesson or trail-riding operation. If a program includes an approved mounted component, only the MWH leader determines whether a participant, horse, volunteer, equipment setup, and conditions are appropriate. Volunteers assist only as trained and directed. Helmets and other protective practices must follow MWH's current program and insurance requirements.

HORSE WELFARE IS PROGRAM SAFETY

A horse's behavior is information. Never punish, force, chase, frighten, or 'make' a horse comply to finish an activity. If the horse shows concern or the situation changes, notify the MWH leader and follow direction.



Attendance, Attire & Property Expectations

Participants and horses depend on a prepared team.

Attendance & Scheduling

- Commit only to shifts you can reasonably fulfill. Consistency is especially important in mentoring programs.
- Arrive at the time assigned by MWH—early enough for briefing and setup, but do not enter private program areas outside scheduled access without permission.
- If sick, injured, delayed, or unable to serve, notify the designated MWH contact as soon as possible. Do not come to serve when illness could endanger participants or others.
- Sign in/out or record volunteer hours when requested. Accurate hours help with staffing, safety, recognition, and program planning.
- Do not bring children, guests, pets, or unapproved helpers to a volunteer shift.

Attire

- Closed-toe, secure footwear suitable for horses and uneven outdoor surfaces is required for horse/facility roles; sturdy boots are strongly preferred where appropriate.
- Wear practical, modest clothing that permits safe movement. Long pants are recommended for horse and facility work.
- Avoid dangling jewelry, loose scarves, unsecured accessories, or clothing that can snag on equipment.
- Use weather-appropriate layers, sun protection, and hydration. MWH may require additional protective equipment for a specific task.

Weather & Cancellation

MWH programs are substantially outdoor and weather-dependent. MWH may delay, modify, relocate, or cancel activities because of lightning, storms, heat, cold, footing, horse condition, facility issues, staffing, or other safety concerns. Volunteers should rely on MWH's official communication rather than make independent assumptions about whether a session will proceed.



What to Expect During a Session

Prepare → Serve → Debrief.

BEFORE	Check in; receive assignment; review participant/horse considerations you need to know; inspect assigned area/equipment; help prepare horses/materials only as authorized.
DURING	Stay attentive; follow the session leader; support rather than take over; encourage participant choice and independence; watch both human and horse body language; report concerns early.
AFTER	Return equipment; assist with approved horse/facility care; report incidents or near misses; participate in debrief; document observations only in approved forms/systems.

Supporting Participants Well

- Speak to the participant directly and respectfully; do not talk about them as though they are not present.
- Give one clear instruction or encouragement at a time when possible; allow processing time.
- Ask before physically assisting unless immediate safety requires action.
- Encourage participants to do as much as safely possible for themselves.
- Notice strengths and effort, not only outcomes.
- Do not label behavior as 'bad.' Share objective observations with the MWH leader.
- Follow the approved lesson/session theme rather than turning the activity into your own lesson.

OBSERVE, DON'T DIAGNOSE

Useful volunteer feedback is specific and behavioral: “Jordan stepped back and covered his ears when the horse moved quickly.” Avoid clinical conclusions such as “Jordan was having an anxiety disorder episode.”

Emergency & Incident Response

In an emergency, calm coordination matters more than speed without direction.

8. STOP — Stop the activity if it can be done safely. Create space and reduce stimulation.
9. FOLLOW LEADERSHIP — The designated MWH leader directs the response. Follow instructions promptly.
10. PROTECT PEOPLE — Assist participants only within your training and assignment. Do not create a second casualty.
11. SECURE HORSES — Approved horse handlers manage horses and move them only as directed.
12. CALL FOR HELP — Call 911 or other emergency assistance when directed, or immediately when delay would create obvious danger and no leader is able to act.
13. PRESERVE ACCESS — Keep gates, driveways, and emergency routes clear. Direct responders if assigned.
14. REPORT FACTS — After immediate needs are addressed, provide factual observations and complete any requested incident/near-miss documentation.
15. DO NOT POST — Never photograph, livestream, discuss, or post an incident on social media.

Examples Requiring Immediate Attention

- Fall, kick, bite, crush/pinning event, runaway or loose horse.
- Loss of consciousness, seizure, breathing difficulty, severe allergic reaction, serious bleeding, suspected fracture, or other acute medical event.
- Severe emotional crisis, threat of self-harm or harm to others, suspected abuse/neglect, missing participant, or unsafe adult behavior.
- Fire, severe weather, lightning, structural/fence failure, vehicle incident, or other environmental hazard.
- Horse injury, sudden lameness, collapse, severe distress, or behavior that makes continued participation unsafe.

INCIDENTS & NEAR MISSES

Report both injuries and near misses. A near miss is an event that could reasonably have caused injury or harm even though it did not. MWH uses these reports to improve training, horse selection, facility conditions, and procedures.



Communication, Media & Representation

Volunteers represent MWH when serving—and should not accidentally speak for MWH when they are not authorized to do so.

- Use designated MWH channels for scheduling, cancellations, participant-related communication, and operational questions.
- Do not provide participant contact information to others or use it for personal, commercial, political, fundraising, or non-MWH purposes.
- Only authorized MWH representatives may make official statements to news media, government agencies, attorneys, insurers, donors/sponsors, or the public on behalf of MWH.
- Personal social-media support is welcome when sharing MWH's already-public posts accurately and respectfully. Do not add private participant details or imply that your personal opinion is an official MWH position.
- Do not create fundraising campaigns, solicit money in MWH's name, promise tax deductibility, or enter sponsorship arrangements without written MWH approval.
- Do not use MWH logos, photos, participant stories, mailing lists, or branded materials for outside purposes without permission.

Photography & Video

Photography and video can be valuable for celebrating the mission, but participant privacy comes first. Only photograph or record when MWH leadership has confirmed the necessary permission and assigned you to do so. Store and transfer media only as directed; do not retain personal copies of restricted participant media.



Christ-Centered Service

Faith is integral to MWH—and must be expressed with humility, wisdom, and care.

MWH's programs intentionally integrate Christian values, Scripture, prayer, discipleship principles, and the example of Jesus Christ. Volunteers should be prepared to support that identity and not undermine the approved spiritual framework while serving.

- Model patience, grace, honesty, humility, self-control, kindness, respect, and servant leadership.
- Participate respectfully in approved prayer, Scripture, reflection, and faith-based program elements consistent with your role.
- Never shame, pressure, manipulate, debate, or coerce a participant regarding faith.
- Do not promise spiritual outcomes, claim special revelation about a participant, or use a participant's vulnerability to advance a personal ministry agenda.
- Refer complex pastoral, theological, family, or crisis matters to MWH leadership and, where appropriate, the participant's parent/guardian or chosen pastoral/professional support.

THE GOAL

We want participants to experience a ministry culture in which biblical truth is lived as well as spoken—where safety, honesty, compassion, healthy boundaries, responsibility, forgiveness, courage, and faithful service are visible in the way we treat people and horses.



Feedback, Concerns & Corrective Action

Healthy teams communicate early.

Volunteers are encouraged to raise questions, safety concerns, ideas, or discomfort directly with MWH leadership. Good-faith safety reporting is valued. Do not allow fear of embarrassment or inconvenience to keep you from reporting a concern.

MWH may coach, retrain, reassign, suspend, or end a volunteer's service when appropriate. Reasons may include, but are not limited to:

- Unsafe horse handling or repeated failure to follow safety instructions.
- Boundary, confidentiality, harassment, discrimination, or safeguarding concerns.
- Unreliable attendance or repeated lateness that compromises program staffing.
- Serving while impaired or engaging in threatening, disruptive, or dishonest conduct.
- Unauthorized contact with participants, media use, fundraising, transportation, or representation of MWH.
- Inability or unwillingness to perform the assigned role safely after training.
- Conduct that materially conflicts with MWH's Christ-centered mission, participant welfare, horse welfare, or operational needs.

NO RETALIATION FOR GOOD-FAITH SAFETY CONCERNS

MWH expects volunteers to report genuine concerns about participant safety, horse welfare, misconduct, or unsafe conditions. Concerns should be raised respectfully and through MWH leadership so they can be evaluated promptly.



Volunteer Quick Reference

The essentials to remember on every shift.

1 • CHECK IN	Know who is leading, what your assignment is, and what you need to know for safety.
2 • STAY IN ROLE	Do only what you are trained and authorized to do.
3 • WATCH BOTH	Pay attention to participant behavior and horse behavior.
4 • PROTECT PRIVACY	Need-to-know information stays need-to-know.
5 • KEEP BOUNDARIES	Be warm, encouraging, observable, and appropriate.
6 • SUPPORT INDEPENDENCE	Help only as much as necessary; let participants succeed for themselves.
7 • REPORT EARLY	Tell the leader about hazards, health changes, behavior concerns, horse concerns, incidents, and near misses.
8 • STOP IF UNSAFE	No activity is more important than a person or horse.
9 • SERVE WITH GRACE	Model Christ-centered patience, humility, truth, and respect.
10 • DEBRIEF	Help MWH learn and improve after each session.

MWH CONTACT

Mentoring with Horses LLC • Greeneville, Tennessee

Call/Text: (423) 268-4126 • Email: MentoringWithHorses@gmail.com • Website:

MentoringWithHorses.com

For emergencies, call 911 when appropriate.



Volunteer Handbook Acknowledgment

Please sign after reviewing the handbook and completing required orientation.

I acknowledge that I have received and reviewed the Mentoring with Horses LLC Volunteer Handbook. I understand that volunteer service involves inherent risks associated with horses, outdoor facilities, animals, equipment, and program activities, and that I am responsible for following MWH training, safety rules, role limitations, and the directions of the MWH leader in charge.

I understand that this handbook is a general guide and is not a contract of employment or a guarantee of volunteer placement, schedule, duration, or assignment. I understand that MWH may revise policies and may reassign, suspend, or end volunteer service when it determines that doing so is appropriate for safety, participant welfare, horse welfare, conduct, program quality, or operations.

I agree to protect confidential information, maintain appropriate participant boundaries, report safety and safeguarding concerns promptly, use MWH property and information only as authorized, and serve consistently with MWH's Christ-centered mission while acting in an MWH volunteer role.

Volunteer Signature: _____ Date: _____

Volunteer Name (print): _____

Parent/Guardian Signature (if required): _____ Date: _____

MWH Representative: _____ Date: _____

ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTS MAY BE REQUIRED

Depending on the role, MWH may require a volunteer application, emergency contact information, liability/release forms, background-screening authorization, media/confidentiality agreements, driving documentation, role-specific skills verification, and/or other forms required by MWH or its insurer.



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Appendix • Orientation & Training Checklist

For MWH internal use.

TRAINING ITEM	DATE	INITIALS
Mission / vision / Christ-centered culture	_____	_____
Volunteer role and chain of responsibility	_____	_____
Participant dignity, boundaries & safeguarding	_____	_____
Confidentiality and privacy	_____	_____
Horse behavior, approach, leading & restricted areas	_____	_____
Facility orientation, gates, arena, equipment & hazards	_____	_____
Attire, hydration, weather & cancellation	_____	_____
Session setup / participant support / cleanup	_____	_____
Emergency plan, 911 access & evacuation	_____	_____
Incident and near-miss reporting	_____	_____
Media / social media / representation	_____	_____
Role-specific practical skills check	_____	_____
Approved Volunteer Role(s): _____		
Restrictions / Notes: _____		
Trainer / MWH Representative: _____		
Volunteer Signature: _____ Date: _____		