



# Pegasus Therapeutic Riding Academy Volunteer Handbook

Pegasus Riding Academy, Inc.  
8297 Bustleton Avenue  
Philadelphia, PA 19152  
215-742-1500/215-742-1501  
[www.pegasusridingacademy.com](http://www.pegasusridingacademy.com)  
Pegasus5@comcast.net

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# *Welcome to Pegasus*

## Our Mission:

The Pegasus program utilizes the horse and its movement to enhance the quality of life for our clients. Our mission is to provide therapeutic exercise in various forms while concentrating on ability rather than disability.

## Our Program at Pegasus:

The Pegasus Therapeutic Riding Program began in 1982 treating only 15 children with mild disabilities. The program has developed and grown into a full time, year round program that serves children and adults with mild to severe disabilities. Pegasus is now a PATH (Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship) Int'l PREMIER ACCREDITED CENTER; a designation of excellence in the field of equine assisted activities and therapies. Our stable houses 15 therapy horses of varied sizes and breeds in order to accommodate the needs of our riders. The Pegasus program reaches over 100 participants each week.

Therapeutic riding is not just a pony ride. All riders are carefully evaluated prior to joining the program. A set of goals are established and incorporated into the rider's "plan" which includes the activities and exercises that will direct the lessons. Therapeutic riding has many components, including physical, psychological, recreational and educational. The natural, unrestricted and three-dimensional movement of the horse provides a unique action that stretches and strengthens joints and muscles and has been extremely effective in building muscle tone, relaxing spastic muscles and developing balance, coordination and perception. Therapeutic riding also provides recreational, socialization and educational opportunities, as well as personal development, elevated self-esteem and self-confidence for people with disabilities of all ages.

The riders have various physical, intellectual, and developmental disabilities such as Autism Spectrum Disorder, Cerebral Palsy, and Traumatic Brain Injuries. Regardless of the riders' challenges, the riders gain a sense of mobility, freedom, and joy through the partnerships made within the Pegasus program.

With approximately 90 people donating their time and energy on a weekly basis, volunteerism is the heart of the Pegasus program. Without you, our services to the community of people with disabilities could not exist. Most of our volunteers find that they receive as much as they give. Therefore, we require commitment and dependability from our volunteers. For many, this opportunity of working with horses and people with disabilities provides an exciting and fulfilling challenge. We welcome you to Pegasus and hope this will be an experience you'll never forget.

*The Staff*

## I. Our Special Riders

Although individuals receive services from Pegasus due to their disability, we recognize every individual as a person first and not by the challenges he or she faces. The person-centered approach requires awareness in the language we use and in the way we communicate with our riders. Although our riders may face challenges, they are individuals who have the right to encounter life just as any other person.

At times some of our riders may not be able to or might have difficulties expressing their needs. If you see or suspect at any time that a rider may be uncomfortable or in need of assistance, you should address them in a supportive manner and alert staff to help meet any needs.

Understanding the rider's needs can help you gain a perspective of how you can be of assistance to them. This can be achieved by actively listening and providing empathy to our riders. Allowing riders to feel heard is an important factor so that they can feel understood. It is also important not to talk over the riders with other volunteers in a manner that ignores the rider.

## II. The Facilities

- A. **The Offices:** The offices are located parallel to Bustleton Avenue. The lobby area is where the riders prepare for their lessons, which also contains toys and games, a water fountain, and a bulletin board. There is access to the arena on the side door of the lobby. In addition, helmets, belts, restrooms, a kitchen, and a meeting room are located in this section of the building.
- B. **The Indoor Arena:** The indoor arena is attached to the offices. This area is utilized for riders during lessons. Riders mount and dismount the horses in this area.
- C. **The Outdoor Arena:** The outdoor arena is located near the barn and next to the pasture. This arena is used for lessons when the weather is nice.
- D. **The Barn:** The horses' stalls are in the barn which is alongside of the indoor arena. There are four entrances into the barn. The barn has a restroom, bulletin board, three tack rooms, and a volunteer room. Beyond the barn are the outdoor arena, trails, and turnout pastures.
- E. **The Old Barn:** The Old Barn is located on the Strahle Street side of the property across from the house. This barn is used for hay storage and storage of equipment.

### III. The Horses

#### A. Why A Horse

- **A horse's gait is the closest thing to the human walk.** It is three dimensional, repetitive, and horses, like humans, walk with one foot in front of the other. Therapeutic horseback riding teaches the muscle groups to work properly and together.
- **Horses make extended eye contact.** The eye contact made between a horse and a human signals an unconditional acceptance on the part of the horse. Additionally, horses are non-judgmental animals and they have the ability to establish trusting relationships with humans.
- **Horses and humans have the same internal rhythm.** The human brain is able to recognize, and eventually mimic the rhythmic movements of the horse. These recognizable movement patterns quiet the brain and allow for various outside forms of communication input.
- We teach riding skills so that riders may enjoy horseback riding as recreation. Through carefully prepared activities, riders learn to stop; start; turn; and negotiate obstacles. Riders also move through various changes of speed when appropriate. Activities include games that assist in balance, motor planning, spatial awareness, and sensory integration.

#### B. The Program Horses

The therapy horses at Pegasus are well-trained and generally well-behaved. The horses used in the program are adopted, leased, purchased, or donated and are all trained before being used in therapy sessions. Just like people, they each have their own personality which you will learn as you work with them. Each horse has his own stall, and his name appears on the stall door. The halters and lead lines are hanging next to the stall's door. Other equipment and supplies are located in the tack room. On the bulletin board next to the tack room door, there is a chart listing each horse and his assigned color. Each piece of equipment used for a particular horse has a piece of colored tape on it matching the color assigned to the horse.

#### C. Horse Sense

If you've never worked around horses before, it can be a bit intimidating the first time. But, it doesn't have to be. The following are a few pointers to keep in mind when working with horses:

1. When you approach a horse, do not hurry. Be calm and confident as horses are intuitive by nature.
2. Speak to the horse in a **low** but **clear** and **friendly** voice, and rub it gently on the neck. Please **do not** pet the horses' faces or try to pet them when they are loose in the outdoor rings or in the stalls.
3. Since horses can't see behind their bodies or directly in front of their heads, let them know you are there by speaking to them and gently touching their body as you move around them.
4. Never put your hands around the horse's mouth.
5. Never pet the horse during lessons. This can distract the horse.
6. Never approach a horse from behind or make sudden movements around a horse as they

can spook very easily.

**7.** If a horse spooks in lessons, move with the frightened horse. Do not move away from the horse or the rider. Keeping your body on the side of the horse lessens the chances of getting hurt.

**8.** Always maintain a balanced position when grooming so you can move away quickly

**9.** Keep your feet away from the horse's feet. The horse may accidentally step on you, causing serious pain and possible injury. (They can weigh over 1,000 lbs.)

**10.** Never bend down to do something and lose awareness of what the horse is doing. Be alert and careful.

#### **D. Verbal Commands**

The horses at Pegasus respond to a number of commands during the course of any given session, or at any time that you are working with them. There are times they will need a **gentle** reminder of what they should be doing at a given moment or what the command means.

- |              |   |
|--------------|---|
| 1. Stand     | Used to tell the horse to stand still, for mounting or grooming           |
| 2. Walk      | Sort of speaks for itself, doesn't it?                                    |
| 3. Fast Walk | Used for an extended walk   |
| 4. Trot      | Light jogging for the horse   |
| 5. Whoa      | Use this when you want the horse to stop (often heard on TV or in movies) |

## **IV. Rules and Procedures**

### **A. Code of Conduct and Disciplinary Policy**

One of the first steps in enabling a volunteer to be successful on the job is the reestablishment of position standards and performance expectations. Within this handbook, volunteers are furnished with Pegasus' policies with respect to conduct on the job. All volunteers are urged to become familiar with Pegasus' rules and standards of conduct and are expected to follow these rules and standards faithfully in carrying out Pegasus' mission. Volunteers who are unsure of what is expected of them should meet with the Program Director as soon as possible to gain a clear understanding of their role and responsibilities. Pegasus' disciplinary policy has been developed to ensure a safe and conducive environment for all persons and equines involved in our therapeutic riding program. The Pegasus Executive Director, Program Director, Equine Director and/or Instructors have the right to discipline volunteers.

### **B. Reasons for Disciplinary Action**

- Disruption of a class
- Unacceptable or unsafe behavior
- Inappropriate sexual comments or sexual misconduct in any form
- Showing any form of disrespect to instructors, riders, or other volunteers
- Carrying out unsafe actions that put an individual at risk
- Use of cell phones or other personal electronic devices in the arenas or barn area
- Use of alcohol, tobacco, or any other illegal substances on Pegasus property
- Failure to adhere to program policies

- Inattentiveness to tasks is unacceptable
- Swearing or inappropriate language
- Rough-housing and inattentive socializing
- Excessive absenteeism or tardiness
- Avoidance of work

### **C. Appropriate Clothing**

- Wear comfortable shoes that protect your feet and ankles.
- Waterproof shoes are preferred during the spring and winter months.
- No sandals, open-toed shoes, crocs, or steel-toed boots are permitted in the barn or arena.
- Wear long pants to protect your legs. Shorts, which come to the knee, are permitted.
- Tank tops and belly shirts are not permitted.
- During the winter months, remember to dress warm, the barn and arena are not heated.
- Wear gloves not mittens, as they do not allow you to use your fingers.
- No clothing with offensive or suggestive messages advertising alcohol or drug use.
- No long or dangling jewelry. Wearing jewelry of this nature is a safety risk to you, our riders, and our horses.

**\*If you fail to comply with the dress code, you will be asked to leave for the day.**

### **D. Cell Phone Usage**

- No phone usage while volunteering including texting or receiving phone calls
- Phones should be turned OFF and kept on your person while at Pegasus. Do not leave them in the volunteer stall. Pegasus is not responsible for lost or missing phones.
- No pictures or videos of riders are to be taken and/or posted to social media
- In an emergency during lessons, you can be reached on the barn phone 215-742-1503

**E. Honoring Confidentiality:** Details of rider's condition and/or progress should not be discussed with any individual outside of the program and/or posted on any social media site.

**F. Parking:** Please drive with care and respect while on Pegasus property. Do not exceed speeds of 10mph while on the premises. Do not park in spots designated as Staff Parking or in the Main Parking Lot. Please park by the Old Barn.

**G. Safety and Insurance Reasons:** Only authorized visitors are permitted in the workplace. When making arrangements for visitors, volunteers should request that they call prior to visit date and speak with the Program Director. Additionally, they will be required to fill out a visitor liability form before the visit begins.

### **H. Attendance and Punctuality**

1. Good attendance and punctuality are essential elements of effective volunteer performance which are measured by objective standards. Poor attendance and tardiness disrupt productivity,

place a hardship on others who must then do the work of the absent, and make it difficult for Pegasus to function effectively. Volunteers are expected to maintain a good attendance record.

2. All new volunteers are required to commit to a minimum of 20 hours of service.
3. Any volunteer recording hours for school must, upon completion of their hours, inform the instructor whether or not they wish to continue serving as a volunteer.
4. It is your responsibility to maintain your own sign in sheet, recording your dates and times of volunteering. This sheet is signed by a staff member each time you complete school volunteer hours.

## **I. Limitations**

At Pegasus, we welcome all volunteers. It is, however, important to note that all volunteers must be able to understand directions, and that certain volunteer opportunities require more physical effort than others. Physical jobs are jobs that will require you to be able to meet certain physical requirements. These jobs entail being able to walk continuously at a brisk pace for thirty (30) minutes, jog for short intervals, support 50 lbs. of weight, hold hands at shoulder height or above for a thirty (30) minute class, and help support a rider in case of an emergency dismount.

Pegasus reserves the right to assess your suitability to safely volunteer and set specific parameters for participation in our program. This may result in the determination that volunteering at this time is unsuitable for you.

**If you are unable to perform these actions, please inform the individual who is doing your volunteer training prior to being assigned to a class time.**

## **V. Your Role as a Volunteer**

### **A. Sign In, Please!**

1. Each time you arrive at Pegasus, the **first** thing you need to do is write your arrival time on the sheet with your name located in the file box in the volunteer center. Be sure to fill in your departure time as well. **Second**, read the whiteboard for important updates! This board is located in the hall between the stalls and entrance to arena. **Lastly**, make yourself a nametag, or put your existing nametag on. Your nametag should not leave the premises.
2. Any change in a volunteer's name, address, telephone number, or insurance information needs to be reported immediately to Pegasus Staff as to ensure uninterrupted communication and for liability purposes.

### **B. Barn Etiquette**

1. Check the whiteboard for any important new information **FIRST**.
2. Only approved Horse Handlers can lead horses. **NEVER** lead or move a horse to or from the stalls if you are not an approved handler, regardless of past or present horse experience.
3. No eating in the barn.



### **C. Duties**

Some of the activities you will be doing at Pegasus while not sidewalking, leading, or getting the horses ready for lessons include, but are not limited to:

1. Sweep aisles
2. Fill water buckets
3. Sweep office area
4. Barn clean up
5. Put tack away
6. Setting up and cleaning up the arena
7. Assisting instructors

### **D. Grooming Procedures and Preparing the Horses for Riders**

All of the horses must be groomed, but the ones that will be used in the upcoming session need to be done first. If you are a new volunteer, please team up with a volunteer who is experienced. A schedule is posted on the bulletin board outside of the tack room that shows which horses will be used in the sessions. Once a horse has been groomed, the letter “G” is placed by his name on the schedule.

1. Each horse has his own grooming supplies. They are kept in color-coded plastic baskets in the tack room. Look for the piece of tape on the front of each basket.
2. Always check the schedule before you start grooming the horses. The same horses may not always be used for a particular session.
3. Since you usually don't have much time before the session starts, you will need to learn to work quickly. Remember, each horse has his own personality. While most enjoy the process, some may need to be handled more gently than others. Two people at the most may work on each horse. Stay alert, always maintain your balance, and speak quietly.
4. Once you're done grooming and if all the horses for the sessions have been groomed, look or ask what else can be done.

### **Pegasus Grooming Procedures**

- a. Have a trained handler put the horse on cross-ties the horse. Next, grab the appropriate groom box with the horse's color on it.
- b. Use the round curry comb in a circular motion on the whole body, from behind their ears to the top of the legs. Make sure to clean the girth area (belly behind the front legs) well.
- c. Hard brush the same area, cleaning the dust from the brush often.
- d. Use the rectangular curry to brush the face in a scrubbing fashion. Brush the way the hair naturally grows.
- e. Soft brush the horse's face first and then brush from the top of the ears all over the horse's body, including the legs and underneath the tail.
- f. Hoof pick the horse's feet. Then clean the mud from his hooves and paint the feet with hoof dressing.

- g. Have a trained handler lead the horse back to his stall, always using a lead line. Please alert instructors or head volunteers if you notice anything out of the ordinary. Please check the white board for any pertinent information about the horses.

### **E. Getting the Riders Ready**

1. As the riders arrive for their lessons, you should be available and willing to participate.
2. All riders must wear a helmet and most a safety belt. Make sure you use the correct size for the rider. They are to fit securely without causing discomfort to the rider.
  - Example: Helmets should stay on the head when harnessed without rocking or moving. It should rest so that there can be two fingers placed between the eyebrows and the edge of the helmet.
  - Example: Safety Belts should stay around the waist without sliding up and down or side to side. The handles should be positioned so that they are on the rider's back/hip area.
3. When the riders are ready, the parent or sidewalker will take them to the area where they will wait to mount the horse. Sidewalkers should stay close and offer assistance so the rider can move about safely.
4. Do not cut through the arena to the mounting ramp or while a lesson is in session. Wheelchairs and walkers can move better on the cement surface outside (weather permitting).
5. Most riders will mount their horse using the ramp. Wait for the instructor to let you know if they are ready for you to lead a rider up. If you take a wheelchair up the ramp, be sure to lock it in position and be careful not to frighten or strike the horse with the chair.

### **F. Instructors, Horse Handlers, & Sidewalkers**

1. Pegasus has several **instructors and assistant instructors**. The instructors are responsible for evaluating the riders' abilities, designing exercises and activities suited for each individual rider, evaluating the rider's progress, redesigning the sessions as needed, and supervising each session to ensure the rider's safety and comfort. They also are responsible for checking all tack and being in a lead role during a rider's mount and dismount.
2. **Horse handlers** are responsible for the horse. They assist the rider by guiding and controlling the horse throughout the entire lesson.
3. **Sidewalkers** are responsible for the rider. They walk on either side of the horse or pony and give the rider as much help in maintaining his/her balance as needed. **(Only leave your rider if told to do so.)** One or two sidewalkers will be assigned to each rider depending on the amount of assistance that is needed.
4. Most of the volunteers at Pegasus start as sidewalkers. If you are interested in becoming a horse handler, email our Equine Director. The Equine Director will review your skill level and determine when you can progress to leading the horse.

### **G. How to Sidewalk with a Rider**

1. Always listen for directions from the instructors. He/she will tell you how much and what type of assistance a particular rider needs during the lesson. The amount of help needed depends on the rider's riding experience and the characteristics of the disability. The goal is to allow riders to be as independent as possible while making sure their safety is not in jeopardy.

2. Walk next to the mounted rider, in line with the center of the saddle or pad. **Do not walk behind the saddle/pad or next to the horse's hindquarters.**
3. Always remain alert to the needs of the rider. What once felt fine in a previous session could be causing problems in the current one. Tell the instructor about the problem and notify the horse handler before making any changes specified by the instructor. Most changes will be made in the center of the ring to avoid interrupting the rest of the class.
4. **DO NOT LEAN ON THE HORSE.**
5. You need to work closely with the horse handler, letting him/her know of any special needs the rider may have. However, do not engage in casual conversation with him/her since it may distract everyone's attention from the lesson.
6. Never walk with your hands in your pockets. You may not be able to help the rider quickly enough should a problem arise.
7. Be enthusiastic during exercises and games to help make it fun and interesting for the rider. Allow the rider to participate as independently as possible.
8. At the halt, remain in position and listen for directions. Be especially alert for balance changes as the horse stops and starts. Never let go of the rider, even when the horse halts (stops).
9. When it's time to dismount, remain next to the rider until the instructor is ready to help him/her dismount. Never dismount or mount the rider without the instructor.

#### **H. We're Walking Where?**

Lessons may take place in the arena, outdoor riding ring, trails, or grounds depending on the rider and weather conditions. Whether you are a sidewalker or a horse handler, you must always remain alert to the needs of the rider and his/her safety. If the lesson is taking place outdoors, you must also remain alert to the general surroundings and how they might affect **everyone** involved in the lesson. If you are having any issues, please inform the instructor immediately.

1. If the lesson is taking place in the outdoor riding ring, be aware of the gate and make sure it is closed while the class is in session.
2. If the lesson is taking place outdoors, please be aware of all noises and activity around you. Any of this can startle the horse.

#### **I. Finishing Up**

When the lesson is over and the rider has dismounted, offer assistance with riders, helmets, belts, reins, and any arena or barn clean-up.

## **VI. Emergency Procedures**

### **A. Horse Emergency – Fallen Rider**

Always move with the frightened horse in the arena. Do not move away from the horse or the rider. If a rider has fallen to the ground, anyone on the team must loudly announce, "**Fallen rider**" into the arena, so that everyone can hear. It is the Horse Leader's job to position the horse so that its body is away from the rider and at a stop. It is a sidewalker's job on the fall side to place themselves between the horse and rider. The other sidewalker stays with the horse.

When the instructor arrives, it is still a sidewalker's job to stay with the horse or place them self between the horse and rider.

## **B. Fire Policy**

### **In the Event of Fire:**

All lessons shall stop. Riders shall dismount and exit the indoor arena with their horses through the door facing the parking lot. All riders on property shall dismount and meet in the outdoor riding ring. All riders, parents, volunteers, guests, and staff shall exit the barn and meet in the outdoor riding ring. **The most senior staff member is responsible for all directions in the outdoor riding ring.**

Survey the scene to make sure it is safe to enter. Designated staff will begin evaluating horses when all participants are out of the barn. Lead horses through the nearest door beginning with horses closest to the fire, to the nearest turnout. Frightened horses may not want to leave their stalls. Talk to them in a reassuring tone of voice. It may be necessary to cover their eyes with a towel. If a horse is unmanageable or refuses to leave its stall, leave the door open and move to the next horse. **Be prepared, a horse may try to run back to the barn once outside!**

## **C. Severe Thunderstorm/Loss of Electricity Policy**

### **In the Event of a Thunderstorm:**

In the event of an approaching thunderstorm ALL outside riders must return to the indoor arena immediately. If lightning appears unexpectedly, riders must dismount immediately and are to be escorted back to the indoor arena by the sidewalkers for a head count. **The most senior staff member is responsible for all directions.** If there is visible lightning outside, all riders will be dismounted, and riding will be discontinued for 15 minutes after the most recent lightning strike.

### **In the Event of Loss of Electricity:**

In the event of loss of electricity all horses will halt in place. Riders will be dismounted at the direction of the senior instructor. All riders, parents, volunteers, guests, and staff shall proceed to the lobby.

## **VII. Volunteer Communication**

Volunteers will communicate directly with the Volunteer Coordinator on a weekly basis. The Volunteer Coordinator will text or call the volunteer to confirm attendance for the listed sessions. Please let the Volunteer Coordinator know if you cannot attend your sessions. The volunteer can call out at 215-742-1500 x 1, text the Volunteer Coordinator they will not be coming, or write their absence on the calendar in the barn. Facebook messaging and emails are not an appropriate way to call out.

Pegasus encourages volunteers to discuss any issues they may have either verbally, in writing, or via e-mail. Volunteers should maintain open and respectful communication with one another and staff so to ensure a safe and happy working environment. If a resolution between volunteers cannot be reached by discussing the issues at hand, volunteers should arrange a meeting with

the instructors. If the concern, problem, or issue is not properly addressed, volunteers should contact the Equine Director, Program Director, or Executive Director. Any information discussed in an open communication meeting is considered to be confidential to the fullest extent possible. Retaliation against any volunteer for appropriate usage of open communication channels is unacceptable.

## **VIII. Final Thoughts**

Pegasus Therapeutic Riding Academy has provided therapeutic horseback riding to children and adults with disabilities since 1982. Anyone interested in volunteering their time to help with the program is welcomed, regardless of experience. Volunteering at Pegasus can be a rewarding and challenging experience. It can also be exciting, especially if you don't have any experience working with horses or people with disabilities.

The program will teach you many things, if you let it. This handbook was developed with the assistance of staff, as well as other volunteers, to help make your experience at Pegasus as pleasant, fulfilling, and productive as possible. Since the program is continually restructured to meet the needs of its participants, this handbook is designed to serve only as a guide. Although many of the basic principles remain constant, one of the key requirements for volunteering at Pegasus is flexibility. It would be almost impossible to adequately cover every possible variation of all the different programs offered on a daily basis at Pegasus.

It is our hope that this handbook will serve as a useful reference for both new and continuing volunteers. And, as always, if you have any questions, just ask.

*The Staff*

## IX. Contact Information

Pegasus Therapeutic Riding Academy  
8297 Bustleton Avenue  
Philadelphia, PA 19152

Barn	215-742-1503	
Cancellations	215-742-1500 x 1	
Program Director	215-742-1500 x 3	
Volunteer Coordinator	215-742-1500 x 2	
Executive Director	215-742-1500 x 4	
Executive Director:	Barbara Wertheimer	<a href="mailto:Pegasus5@comcast.net">Pegasus5@comcast.net</a>
Program/Equine Director:	Teresa Doherty	<a href="mailto:PegasusTeresa@comcast.net">PegasusTeresa@comcast.net</a>
Volunteer Coordinator	Elysia Rodriguez	<a href="mailto:PegasusVolunteerCoordinator@comcast.net">PegasusVolunteerCoordinator@comcast.net</a>

[www.pegasusridingacademy.com](http://www.pegasusridingacademy.com)

### Pegasus Therapeutic Riding Academy Volunteer Hours:

Monday: 5:15 pm-8:15 pm

Tuesday: 5:15 pm-8:15 pm

Wednesday: 9:00 am-12:30 pm and 5:15 pm-8:15 pm

Thursday: 9:00 am-12:30 pm and 5:15 pm-8:15 pm

Saturday: 8:30 am-1:45pm

Sunday: 1:00 pm-4:15 pm