

Whispering Meadows Ranch

Rider Handbook



www.whisperingmeadowsranch.org

2015-2016

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We are delighted that you have chosen Whispering Meadows Ranch to provide your loved one with Equine-Assisted activities! We strive to be a place where visitors and their families feel welcomed and accepted unconditionally. The ranch's foundational principles are Christ-centered and we are guided by and fully embrace Christian values including respect, kindness and compassion.

Mission

It is our mission to enrich the lives of those with disabilities and special needs through equine-assisted, recreational and educational programs for Flagler and surrounding counties.

The Founder

The ranch was founded in 2008 by Helene & Richard Davis and their daughter, Kristine Aguirre. Whispering Meadows Ranch is a PATH Int'l (Professional Association Therapeutic Horsemanship) Member Center with certified instructors on site to teach the equine-assisted programs. The ranch family of community members and volunteers along with the Davis' are committed to providing an environment of compassion and understanding while utilizing the therapeutic effect of horses in all aspects of the program.

Whispering Meadows Ranch is recognized and certified as a Federal 501C-3 non-profit organization.

Therapeutic Riding

Equine assisted programs have been recognized as an effective method of therapy, especially when tailored to enhance a rider's specific needs. Goals include building strength, balance, sensory integration and spatial awareness. Therapeutic riding is supervised, dynamic, safe and enjoyable for children and adults with a variety of physical, mental and emotional disabilities. Specific lessons are designed to meet the needs of the individual rider in order to enhance physical, emotional and cognitive development.

Hippo-therapy

Hippo-therapy performed by an Occupational Therapist (OT), Physical Therapist (PT) or Speech and Language Pathologist (SLP) is a medical therapy provided under a physician's prescription and is a strategy that utilizes the horse's natural and multidimensional movements. This approach is used as part of an integrated treatment program, with the ultimate goal of achieving measurable and functional outcomes. It is different than regular horseback riding and does not teach those traditional skills. The gait of the horse is unique because it is similar to that of the human and can thus facilitate corresponding movement patterns in the human pelvis. The horse's walk provides valuable sensory stimulus that is rhythmic, variable, and repetitive. This dynamic movement, when coupled with the traditional PT, OT or SLP techniques,

works to improve functional outcomes, both physically and emotionally. This type of therapy generates muscle tone, strength, coordination, balance response, postural function and sensorimotor capacity, while providing the warmth, grace and healing effect of horses and ponies. This therapy is instructed by a licensed OT, PT, or SLP certified PATH Therapist and assisted by a certified PATH instructor.

For additional information on PATH International please visit:
<http://www.pathintl.org>.

Whispering Meadows Ranch Horses and Ponies

WMR owns the horses and ponies used by the program. All have been selected for their quiet temperaments and have been trained to be comfortable working in the mounting area, around wheelchairs and other assistive devices, as well as with leaders and side-walkers. However, no matter how calm the horses may seem, they may occasionally spook at sudden noises or movement, or for reasons unknown. For this reason, it is imperative to follow all barn and safety rules.

The horses and ponies used in WMR classes are wonderful animals and they deserve the utmost respect for their tolerance of tight leg muscles, bouncing riders, and hands which may pull too hard or too often.

No one - leader, side-walker, rider, or volunteer - may tease, taunt, harass or purposely annoy, scare or irritate any horse for the purpose of exercises or games solely for the client's benefit. All horses will be treated with respect, understanding, and in a humane manner at all times.

Weight Limit Policy

The first priority of Whispering Meadows Ranch, Inc. is to ensure the safety of our riders, volunteers, and horses. In order to achieve this goal, we have established the following weight limit policy in regards to riding in this program.

Weight Limit Policy: 220 pounds - dependent upon ambulatory status, range of motion and discretion of instructor.

The Program Director and/or Head Instructor have the discretion to make exceptions to this policy.

Payment Policy

- Whispering Meadows Ranch is open year round with sessions being in 4 terms (Fall, Winter, Spring & Summer)
- Each term is a varied number of weeks.

- Lessons are \$25.00 per session if paid in full and on time. Special payment arrangements may be made, but must be approved before the session begins.

Riders will be eligible to apply annually for a scholarship, when funding permits. The rider must have participated in at least one term of lessons previously to qualify. For additional information please ask for the scholarship packet.

If for any reason, a rider does not want to continue the term, the remaining lessons are non-refundable.

Cancellation Policy

We are looking forward to having you with us. We ask that you adhere to the following cancellation policies so we may offer the best quality program possible.

- Please arrive on time for your therapy session. Arriving late will shorten your ride time and we want to be sure that you get the full benefit of your scheduled appointment. The Ranch appreciates you understanding that lessons may run past the allotted time scheduled. Please expect a 10-15 minute window of flexibility for us to check safety issues and volunteer assignments.

- We require a minimum of 24 hours notice for the cancellation of a therapy appointment. Cancellations made less than 24 hours in advance may be considered a “no-show” and subject to a cancellation fee of 50% of your lesson fee. Our instructors and volunteers are scheduled around each lesson and we regard and respect their time.
- In case of an emergency, the client or parent/guardian should call as soon as it is apparent they will not be able to attend due to emergency.
- In case of a sudden illness, the client or parent/guardian should call as soon as it is apparent that they will not be able to attend due to illness. The absence may be counted as a cancellation.
- Excessive absences (3 or more) or no-shows (more than 1), will be subject to losing your lesson time and being placed at the end of the waiting list.
- Clients who have been awarded a scholarship for the session and have more than 1 “no-show” will be subject to forfeiting the scholarship and being ineligible for future scholarships.
- Cancellations made for reasons that could be rescheduled at another time, such as other therapies, doctor appointments, and vacations must be submitted to your instructor a minimum of 2 weeks prior to the absence.

- Weather can be an issue with our outdoor riding environment. Should you have any questions regarding lessons being cancelled due to inclement weather, please text or call Kristine at 386-503-6312.

The 2015-16 schedule is as follows:

Fall Session: September 1, 2015 to December 18, 2015

Winter Session: January 4, 2016 to April 4, 2016

Spring Session: May 1, 2016 to June 30, 2016

Summer Session: Select weeks TBD

A new Physicians Form is required for all riders. Please have the new form turned in by December 1, 2015. If the form is not turned in by this date, lessons for your rider will be on hold until we receive all the proper documentation.

Are you a new rider to our program? We will schedule a new rider assessment, as well as a tour of the facility. Necessary paperwork and payment arrangements must be finalized before a rider is put on the schedule. This will be a great opportunity for the rider and their family to get a sense of the program.

Dress Code

- Boots or shoes with smooth, hard soles with heels are preferred.
- Absolutely no open toe shoes or flip-flops are allowed.
- No sharp items in your pockets.
- Gloves in the winter are recommended and available.
- Helmets are mandatory for riders at all times and must be ASTM/SEI certified.
- Jean pants, comfortable pants, or riding breeches, are recommended.
- Tank tops/exercise tops are fine, but strapless tops spaghetti straps/plunging necklines are not acceptable.
- Must not have underwear exposed.
- Do not wear loose or dangly jewelry or earrings.

Barn Safety Rules

- There is no smoking allowed on the property.
- Alcohol is not permitted.

- A child under the age of 18 in the riding program must have a parent, guardian, or caregiver on site for the duration of the lesson (unless special arrangements are made and approved).
- There is no littering on the campus.
- All riders must wear a helmet at all times when around the horses or riding.
- All riders and volunteers must respect the rights and privacy of others.
- No feeding snacks to the horses unless approved and supervised by the instructor.
- All recycling must be put into the recycling container.
- Voices must be at an acceptable level, no yelling.
- No running and no climbing on fences.
- Only riders, instructors or appointed volunteers may be in the tacking or mounting areas.
- Riders are never allowed in or around the horse pastures for any reason.
- Do not throw any objects unless it is part of your riding lesson plan.
- Do not stand behind the horses.

- When a rider is with the horses, they must have an instructor assisting them at all times.
- Parents, guardians, caregivers, friends and family members of riders must not go on the mounting ramp or in the arena without prior approval from the instructor.
- Parents, guardians, caregivers, friends and family members must not speak to the rider during their therapy session. This will help your rider stay focused during the lesson.
- Siblings must stay with their parents or play up front on the nature trails. Siblings must not approach horses in grooming area.

Ranch Evacuation/Emergency Policy

The most important thing to remember in any emergency is to remain calm and to help the riders remain calm and feel safe.

In the event of an emergency, look for the nearest exit sign (all buildings have signs at each exit). Exit the building and go to the area in the arena to wait for further instructions from the staff or instructor in charge.

- In all emergencies, the Instructor is responsible for making decisions on actions to be taken and for designating persons to assist them.

- The Instructor is responsible for organizing the safe movement of people; the leaders are responsible for the horses; and Side-walker(s) are responsible for the riders.
- If an emergency of any kind (e.g. illness, injury, fall, seizure, storms or fire) should occur, please listen carefully to the Instructor's directions.
- All riding will STOP until the Instructor gives further directions. (Some horses need to keep moving when nervous).
- No-one, **including parents**, will be permitted to enter the arena during an emergency unless authorized by the Instructor.
- There should be no excessive talking or noise.

Whispering Meadows Ranch Budget

Rider fees only account for a small percentage of the actual cost of operating the program. The rest of the funds are raised through donations from individuals, corporations, and foundations, through grants, and fund-raising events.

Here are some ways you can help support our program

- Make a donation to one of our fundraising campaigns
- Visit our "Giving Tree" by the tack barn
- Investigate matching gift programs offered by your employer

- Participate in our annual festivals
- Adopt-A-Horse
- Tell friends, co-workers, and others about Whispering Meadows Ranch.

If you have personal or professional connections with foundations, corporations or individuals that might assist us in our fundraising efforts, please contact Kristine at 386-503-6312.