

# Therapeutic Riding Program Receives Grant, Seeks Volunteers

By James Senft

Lancaster County Therapeutic Riding is now training volunteers. The organization seeks dedicated people who are interested in helping people with disabilities. People who enjoy working with people and have a love of horses are especially encouraged to apply.

LCTR's upcoming volunteer training sessions were made possible by a \$1,500 grant from the Ressler Mill Foundation, a nonprofit organization that aids educational programs throughout Lancaster County.

The volunteer training sessions will be held on the evenings of Friday and Monday, Feb. 23 and 26, and on the mornings of Saturdays, March 3, 10, and 31. The training sessions are held at Greystone Manor Stables, 1061 Hartman Station Road, Leola, where the LCTR program is based. For more information on attending any of the volunteer training sessions, interested readers should call LCTR at 615-9222.

Patti Draude, volunteer coordinator for LCTR, said that the organization has about 100 volunteers and always welcomes more. She said that while a knowledge and interest in horses helps, volunteers should first and foremost enjoy working with people. "I see this as a people program, even though the horses are a very big part of it," she said.

Draude added that it is helpful if volunteers have a knowledge of horses; however it is not a requirement as long as people are willing to learn. "We've had a good number of volunteers who have had absolutely no horse experience," Draude said.

"It's also helpful if they have any knowledge of various disabilities," Draude said of potential volunteers, noting that LCTR works with people with a variety of physical and mental disabilities.

The biggest requirements of volunteers, however, is that they be dedicated and have good attitudes. "We're looking for cheerful and conscientious (people), and they need to be team players," Draude said.

Draude said that because of the grant from the Ressler Mill Foundation, the training sessions this year are much more extensive than they have been in years past. Through the training, volunteers experience what LCTR's riders experience, she said. For example, some of the people who benefit from LCTR cannot mount a horse in the same way as a person without disabilities. "We have to put them on sideways, with their leg going up over the horse's neck," Draude explained. She said that at training sessions, volunteers have been learning how to get onto a horse in that same way. "They experience what that feels like. You have to trust the people who are helping you," she said.

Volunteers-in-training also practice walking next to a horse as it carries a rider, leading a horse, and other skills they will need to learn to work with the program. "We're doing the kinds of things that we do with our riders, so they're experiencing those things," Draude said. "The goal is that the more understanding they have, the more empathetic they can be to our riders," she said. Volunteers also become more comfortable with the horses during training sessions, Draude said. Safety is always a top priority of the LCTR program, Draude added.

LCTR volunteers need to be dedicated to the program. "Our sessions are six weeks, so I ask (volunteers) to make sure that they sign up at least for the six-week session,"

Draude said. “It is very important, because if I don’t have all the volunteers that I need, it’s possible that a rider might not be able to ride.”

Volunteers who feel especially committed to the program may move on to become LCTR instructors, Draude noted. She added that the grant from Ressler Mill will also help LCTR to train more instructors.

For all of their hard work, volunteers get a real sense of satisfaction from the program, Draude said. For herself, she said that she enjoys seeing the smiles on the faces of the people the program benefits. She likes to see the riders succeed with the program and know that she is helping to make a difference in someone’s life.

Draude said that people new to the program may be surprised at how much of a difference a caring person and a horse can make to a person with disabilities. “Horses tune in to people’s emotions. They really do,” she said. “Some people think it sounds silly, but you have to spend time around them to see that. Horses are very special animals.”

Draude told the story of a 99-year-old man who dreamed of getting back on a horse and, through LCTR, was able to live that dream. “Everybody was in tears because this horse, as this man was in his wheelchair, she stood there and rested her nose right at his shoulder,” Draude recalled. “That horse never stood so quietly, and you could see it in her face as he was riding that she knew this was something really, really special.”

LCTR has been helping people with disabilities since 1981. The nonprofit organization began with seven riders and currently serves between 65 and 70 riders each year.



Lancaster County Therapeutic Riding is holding workshops for potential

volunteers, giving volunteers like Karen Weber-Zug (center) an opportunity to work with presenters like Bev Peters (left), volunteer coordinator Patti Draude (right) and horses like River Boy. The training sessions are being made possible through a grant from the Ressler Mill Foundation.

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**Riding Program**