



# **Wild Hearts Therapeutic Equestrian Program**

## **VOLUNTEER HANBOOK**

**Wild Hearts Therapeutic Equestrian Program, Inc.**

Mailing Address:

150 West Street

West Bridgewater, MA 02379

(978) 578-4438

[jlovely@wildheartstherapeutic.org](mailto:jlovely@wildheartstherapeutic.org)

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

## **Welcome to Wild Hearts Therapeutic Equestrian Program!**

Thank you for your interest in Wild Hearts and Equine Assisted Activities and Therapy. We are dedicated to enriching the physical, cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and social well-being of our participants in an environment that is safe, nurturing, challenging and fun. Our mission statement says it all:

***“Our mission is to enrich the lives of our participants and all who work with us through equine assisted activities and therapy.”***

This manual is meant to be a guide as you work as a volunteer for our program and a supplement to orientation and training. Volunteer training is an ongoing process. Our hope is that this training will provide you with a good foundation for your association with Wild Hearts, and that your time spent with us will be safe, rewarding, and fun!

Volunteers are the strength and core of our program. Without your service, your smile, and the contribution of your time, our program could not exist. My door is always open to you, and I am never more than a phone call away to give you the support you need.

Warm regards,

Julie Lovely  
Wild Hearts Executive Director

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## **ABOUT WILD HEARTS THERAPEUTIC EQUESTRIAN PROGRAM**

Wild Hearts Therapeutic Equestrian Program was founded in 2009 by Julie Lovely as a non-profit organization dedicated to enriching the lives of children and adults with physical, cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and social challenges. Currently, Wild Hearts operates out of Lonesome Dove Stable in Raynham, MA. In addition to therapeutic riding, as we grow as plan to offer hippotherapy, equine facilitated psychotherapy, and a NARHA Horses for Heroes program. For a description of each of these programs, please visit our website at [www.wildheartstherapeutic.org](http://www.wildheartstherapeutic.org).

Wild Hearts is a member center of NARHA (North American Riding for the Handicapped Association), and therefore we follow their rules, guidelines, safety standards, and procedures. NARHA was established in 1969 and fosters safe, professional, ethical and therapeutic equine activities through education, communication, research, and standards. All of our instructors are NARHA certified as well as licensed by the state of Massachusetts.

## **GENERAL POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

### **Arrival and Sign In**

We ask class volunteers to arrive at least **15 minutes before** the start of the class if you are a sidewalker, and **30 minutes before** if you are a horse handler (leader). Please plan to stay 15 minutes after the end of the class. Upon arrival, volunteers are required to sign in, and before leaving they are asked to sign out in order to keep a record of the number of hours worked and duties performed. A volunteer sign-in log is kept at the Wild Hearts facility – check with the instructor if you are unsure as to where it is located.

### **Cancellations**

As a volunteer, your role is critical to the success of our program and ultimately our riders. **As part of the commitment we ask that you reserve cancellations for emergencies.** Your service is extremely important to the safety of our participants and if you must cancel please contact Wild Hearts as soon as possible so that a replacement can be found. In the event that your rider has cancelled with us, we will do everything we can to contact you in advance via phone and e-mail. It is important that we have all of your contact information on file.

### **Dress Code**

Appropriate footwear and clothing should be worn at all times. Wear comfortable shoes that protect your feet and ankles. No sandals, open toed shoes, or open backed clogs. No jewelry other than small earring studs and a watch. Dangling jewelry can get caught in manes, tails, or be snatched by a client or distract them during a session. No clothing with offensive or suggestive messages or slogans or that promote alcohol or drug use. Perfumes should be avoided as they can bother sensitive students, as well as attract bees and flies.

### **Smoking & Alcohol Policy**

Wild Hearts and all of the farms from which we operate are smoke-free environments. There is a no-tolerance policy with regards to alcohol. Staff reserves the right to require a volunteer to leave the premises if alcohol consumption is suspected.

### **Commitment and Availability**

Adequate support is critical in safely serving our clients. We therefore request volunteers directly involved with our riding program (horse handlers/leaders and sidewalkers) be willing to commit to a minimum of one and a half (1 ½) hours each week on the same day and time for the length of a session. Please make every effort to keep cancellations to emergencies only.

Volunteers must understand and respect the fact that the instructor is in charge of the class environment. As a volunteer you accept feedback from the instructors regarding your work. In addition it is important that you understand that the instructor's goal is to offer the best riding experience for each student. At Wild Hearts, we are always trying to strengthen the relationships between volunteers and the organization. We believe it is important to develop and maintain and relationship of mutual respect with our volunteers. Wild Hearts would not exist without our volunteers.

### **Conduct, Behavior and Dismissal**

All volunteers are expected to set a good example for the students. Inappropriate language, disruptive behavior or behavior which threatens the safety of others is not acceptable, nor will it be tolerated. After a first attempt to correct the behavior, offenders will be asked to leave the premises by a staff member and withdrawal from the program will be immediate. As volunteers, you are representatives of our organization. If you are subject to any inappropriate behavior by a participant, please do not approach the individual. Notify staff immediately. Please inform the staff immediately of any concerns regarding the behavior of program horses such as biting, kicking, etc.

## **SAFETY**

*Safety is always the most important issue in our program! While the instructors try to keep the barn area and riding lessons safe, they cannot keep an eye on everything. Please try to use common sense around the barn area and let us know of any safety concerns you might have.*

### **General Safety Rules**

- DRIVE SLOWLY IN DRIVEWAY!
- Absolutely NO SMOKING on any premises.
- Please make sure that there are no grooming kits, halters, or lead ropes lying around the aisle.
- Riders must always wear a helmet when working with the horses.
- Please do not run or shout around the horses; they might get frightened or distrustful.
- Riders must never be left unattended anywhere on the farm!
- Riders should never enter the paddocks or stalls where horses are loose.
- Please be sure that all gates and stall doors (and latches) are open all of the way before leading a horse through. Gates need to be closed properly as horses can be pretty sneaky and try to escape when given the opportunity!

### **Safety Around Horses**

- Always speak to a horse before approaching or touching him. Approach from the side, and walk around him to the front, never behind him or under him.
- Never wrap a leadrope or the reins around your hand or yourself. A horse is much stronger than you and could crush your bones if he pulls suddenly.
- Never let a leadrope or reins drag on the ground or near your feet (you or the horse could trip).
- Do not attach cross-ties to the bit.
- Never hand feed treats. Place the treat in a bucket first.
- When entering the arena, make sure to yell out “DOOR” and check for other horses before entering.
- Stirrups should always be run up or put over the saddle when leading the horse without a rider.
- Keep a good distance between horses at all times.

## **EMERGENCY PROCEDURES**

**Please familiarize yourself with the location of phones, fire extinguishers and exits in whichever of our facilities you are working in.** In the event of an emergency, remain calm. Remember that horses and riders will pick up on your nervous energy. Listen to the instructor's directions and follow instructions calmly and quietly.

### **Unmounted Emergency**

Try to move the student away from the horse or to a safe location. Do not try to assist with an agitated horse - let the instructor handle the horse and you keep the child calm.

### **Mounted Emergency**

If the horse becomes agitated or excited, the instructor will attempt to take the student off of the horse in a safe "**emergency dismount.**" If this is not possible, the sidewalkers should look to support the rider in any way, even if it is to break the rider's fall. The leader should focus on the horse and try to take it away from the source or student.

### **Emergency Dismount**

If an emergency dismount becomes necessary the **horse handler/leader** should hold the horse at a halt until the rider is fully clear of the horse and equipment. If a halt is not possible, the horse should be kept as straight as possible so as not to unbalance the rider. Once the rider has been dismounted the horse handler should take care not to turn the horse's haunches into the rider as they walk the horse away. The **sidewalker** that the rider is falling away from should remove the stirrup and reins from the rider. The sidewalker toward whom the rider is falling should remove the stirrup, then hug the rider around the waist, trunk, or arms, and pull the rider off and away from the horse. They should bend one knee to help brace themselves. The rider can then slide down the sidewalker's bent leg. If the sidewalker feels she cannot bear the full weight of the descending rider, a controlled fall can be initiated, taking care to protect the rider's and sidewalker's heads and to roll with the fall as much as possible. It is important that the sidewalker break the rider's fall. Once the rider has dismounted, the leader should move the horse away to a safe distance, then halt and await instructions.

### **Loose Horse**

All students should be removed from the area, and should stay with volunteers until the horse is caught. Only instructors should try to catch a loose horse. You may be asked to grab a feed bucket to lure the horse in.

### **Fallen Rider or Medical Emergency**

Should a rider fall from a horse, become injured or have a medical emergency during a lesson, all activity should stop. The instructor is responsible for managing the incident including applying any necessary first aid. The horse leader should move the horse away from the scene. Stay calm and follow the instructor's directions.

*\*\*\*\*All of the Wild Hearts instructors are certified in CPR and First Aid.\*\*\*\**

## **VOLUNTEER ROLES**

### **Who is a Volunteer?**

Volunteers are people who give their time and services and who assume the obligations of the program of their own free will. Some bring skills in horsemanship, while others have leadership skills. Some merely bring understanding and acceptance, seeking fuller and more satisfying lives for themselves. Volunteers are people who reach out to others and help them improve their quality of life.

Volunteers are indispensable at all levels of the organizations. They may be instructors, leaders, sidewalkers, grooms, tack cleaners, office support, recruiters, fund-raisers, etc. All volunteers need not be equine oriented. Program volunteers must be able to jog alongside a horse at the trot, while supporting a rider with disabilities mounted on the horse.

We ask that all program volunteers make a weekly commitment to the class they have been assigned and that they give sufficient notice of cancellation when they are unable to attend.

### **Opportunities**

Whether you are able to devote one hour or ten hours per week, your time and energy will always be greatly appreciated. Assistance is needed in all aspects of our program. Opportunities exist with program volunteers (horse handling/leading and sidewalking), fundraising, public relations, grant writing, volunteer recruitment, photography/video, and future planning.

## **PROGRAM VOLUNTEERS**

### **Horse Handler/Leader**

As the leader, you will lead the horse or pony during the lesson. Your first responsibility is the horse, but you also need to be aware of the rider's needs and the instructor's directions. The leader's job requires familiarity and confidence in horse handling. When leading the horse, please walk in line with the horse's head and avoid "dragging" the horse along. You will be responsible for setting and maintaining the pace of the walk or trot as directed by the instructor. Each rider will have different requirements.

During mounting and any prolonged periods of standing still, it is recommended that you stand in front of the horse facing the horse. People and horses are equally deserving of the personal space; please try not to crowd the horse (especially around the face).

You also need to be aware of your steering around obstacles, making sure to leave room for the horse and sidewalkers to go by. In an emergency, you are asked to stay with the horse and lead the horse away from the scene of the incident. Please notify the instructors of any behaviors that you find questionable or bothersome - your feedback may alert us to an unknown problem. Please always ask for help!

## **Sidewalker**

The sidewalker is responsible for the safety and comfort of the rider while on the horse and on the ground. During the lesson, the sidewalker offers physical and moral support to the rider. Please walk in line with the rider's leg, unless you are instructed to do otherwise; you will then be in the most effective place to offer assistance as needed.

Be patient. Some riders require a little time to process instructions. Let the instructor guide you as to when it is appropriate to offer help. Let them try first before you help! When directed by the instructor, you should assist the rider to carry out the instructor's directions, but make sure not to introduce other instructions that might cause confusion.

The instructor will inform you of each rider's needs and special procedures. Generally, during mounting, you will be asked to stand on the off side (right side of the horse) to support the rider's weight coming down into the saddle and put weight into the off-side stirrup. If a rider needs physical support (see below for levels of support), make sure that your hand or arm rests gently on the rider. The position of the supporting hand or arm should be changed frequently so that no numbness on the rider's limbs occurs.

It is a physically demanding job to be a sidewalker, and it is imperative that we know about any physical limitations that you may have.

### **LEVELS OF RIDER SUPPORT**

*Least support = 1, Most support = 4*

1. **Spotter**  
Watching from a distance
2. **Sidewalking**  
Walking next to the rider's leg, not touching, but watching and ready to offer a "hold" if rider needs support
3. **Ankle hold**  
The sidewalker cups the hand closest to the rider and gently holds it against the rider's ankle from behind.
4. **Arm-over-thigh hold**  
Sidewalker holds the front of the saddle the hand closest to the rider. The soft part of the underside of your forearm should rest gently on the rider's thigh. Be careful that your elbow does not accidentally dig into the rider's leg or the horse's side.

## **A TYPICAL AFTERNOON AS A PROGRAM VOLUNTEER...**

### **12:30pm**

Horse handler/leader arrives 30 minutes before the start of a lesson. Sign in. Horse need to be brought in and groomed. Help to greet rider and their families and make them feel welcome.

### **2:45pm**

Sidewalkers arrive 15 minutes before the start of the lesson. Sign in. Help to greet riders and their families and make them feel welcome.

### **1:00pm**

Assist the rider in grooming and tacking the horse (not all riders groom or tack). Most students do not use bridles, but rather attach reins to the halter. If a rider does use a bridle, only an instructor bridles the horse.

Riders that do groom, use the following sequence of brushes:

- Curry comb
- Hard brush
- Soft brush
- Mane & Tail
- Hoof pick

Check with the instructor if you're unsure of a student's abilities to use all 5 grooming tools.

### **1:15pm**

Leader leads the horse into the arena for mounting. Mounting will be done by the instructor, however, your assistance during the mounting process is needed.

### **1:20pm**

During the lesson, you will be either a leader or a sidewalker (refer to volunteer roles for descriptions). The instructor will guide you as to how much support a rider needs and will try to involve you in games, etc.

### **1:50pm**

Rider dismounts in the arena and leader leads horse back to grooming area. Sidewalkers stay with the rider. Leader helps the rider to untack the horse and brushes the horse using a soft brush. (Again, not all riders untack and brush – check with the instructor.)

### **2:00pm**

Horse returned to paddock or stall. All tack and grooming materials should be put away. The aisle needs to be swept and all manure picked up from rings, aisle, driveway etc. If this is the last lesson of the day, tack (saddles, girths, bits and bridles if used) should be cleaned. All games and props should be put away.

## **WORKING WITH THE STUDENTS**

Working with people who have special needs may be a new experience for some volunteers. Please take time to get to know the students and direct any questions you may have to the instructors. Often a major barrier for people with special needs is not the disability itself, but the lack of awareness and knowledge by others. Following are some hints to working with people with special needs.

### **Wheelchair Etiquette**

Many people are unsure how to act when meeting someone in a wheelchair. Please try to keep the following in mind. Always ask the wheelchair user if they would like assistance before you help. Be respectful – people’s wheelchairs are an extension of their body space. Don’t hang or lean on a wheel chair unless you have permission. Speak directly and be careful not to exclude the wheelchair user from conversations. If a conversation lasts more than a few minutes, sit or kneel to get on the same level as the person in the wheelchair.

### **Non-verbal students**

Do not assume that students who do not communicate with words do not understand what you are saying. Try to talk to them like you would to any other person. Many people who are non-verbal have hand gestures they use to communicate.

### **Riders with low muscle tone**

These riders will need more support when in the saddle, but we always try to do as little as possible. The instructor will show you how much and how to support each rider. When physically supporting a rider, make sure not to apply too much pressure to the rider’s limbs or pull on their body. Always ask for permission before touching the rider to reposition or re-direct his or her body. Don’t put too much strain on your own body while assisting a student - inform the instructor if you are having any pain.

### **Escorting an Individual with a Visual Impairment**

If an individual with a visual impairment looks like they need assistance, please ask first if help is needed. Remember that they may only need verbal direction. If physical assistance is needed, allow the individual to hold onto your arm above the elbow and walk one-half step ahead. The individual may also have a specific way that they prefer to be assisted.

**\*\* Unnecessary talking during riding lessons should be avoided;  
it might distract or confuse the rider. Be patient and clear with your communication.  
*Be positive and confident; your attitude will be mirrored by our riders!\*\****

## **GROOMING**

*In order...*

- Curry Comb – Curry in circles, starting at the top of the neck and working towards tail. This is to loosen dirt and hair. Be firm but aware of the sensitive parts of a horse such as belly. Avoid using the curry comb on the horse's face and legs.
- Hard Brush – Short stroke in the same direction as hair. This smoothes the hair and flicks off what the curry comb loosened.
- Soft Brush – Use slightly longer strokes than hard brush, smoothes and polishes hair.
- Mane & Tail Brush – Be sure not to allow the student to stand behind the horse when brushing the tail.
- Hoof pick – Clean feet, remove any dirt or rocks – often volunteers will hold the horse's hoof for the student to pick.

**REMEMBER TO ALWAYS WALK IN FRONT  
OF THE HORSE WHEN SWITCHING SIDES**

## **TACKING**

- The saddle should not sit too high on horse's shoulder, and the saddle pad should not be tight against the withers.
- The girth should be attached on right side of the horse first and then brought under the belly. It should start loose and then be tightened one hole at a time to prevent any painful pinching.
- If a rider's horse is tacked prior to their arrival, the girth should stay loose until the horse is ready to go into the ring. At that time, the girth should be snug but not tight. Girth should be tightened and checked before student mounts.
- Saddle pad loops can be put on billet straps of saddle or left loose, but make sure that they aren't stuck under saddle where they would rub the horse's back.
- Most students use reins attached to upper rings of a halter. Please make sure that the clip handles are facing away from the horse's face (so the clips won't poke the horses).
- **ONLY THE INSTRUCTOR WILL BRIDLE THE HORSE.**

## HORSE SENSES

When working with horses communication is key. Horses communicate through body language, vocalization, smell, taste, and touch. Understanding THEIR language is the key to predicting behaviors, managing risks, and building a positive relationship.

- **HEARING:** The horse's sense of hearing is very acute. A horse's mind is focused where his ears are pointing, so note the position of the horse's ears for signs of his/her mood. Forward ears communicate attentiveness and interest. Ears flicking back and forth indicate attentiveness or interest. Flattened ears indicate anger, threat or fear.
- **SIGHT:** The horse's eyes are set on either side of the head, creating good peripheral vision but also two blind spots: directly in front and directly behind. Therefore, the best way to approach a horse is at his shoulder.
- **TOUCH:** The horses' sense of touch is very sensitive. They can detect very light touch or pressure. Each horse has sensitive areas (i.e. flank and belly areas) and it is important to be familiar with them. The tongue, lips, and bars of the mouth are especially sensitive places, and we need to use caution when a horse has a bit in his mouth.
- **SMELL:** The horse's sense of smell is thought to be very acute and it allows him to recognize other horses and people. Smell also enables the horse to evaluate situations. We ask that treats are not carried in your pocket since horses may go after them.
- **TASTE:** Taste is closely linked with the sense of smell and helps the horse to distinguish palatable foods and other objects. A horse may lick or nibble while becoming familiar with objects and people.
- **SIXTH SENSE:** A horse does have a "sixth sense" when evaluating the disposition of those around him. Horses can be hypersensitive in detecting the moods of their handlers and riders. A good therapy horse is chosen for their sensitive response to the rider.

## **HORSE BEHAVIOR**

- **FLIGHT AS NATURAL INSTINCT:** Wild horses use the “flight” technique as their defense against predators and other dangers, but that instinct remains in domesticated horses. Although our therapy horses are chosen for the patience and tolerance, they are still prey animals and we need to be aware of their instinctive behaviors.
- **HERD ANIMAL:** Horses like to stay together in a herd or group with an established pecking order and one or two horses as the dominant individuals. Some horses may not like being alone. This is a consideration when horses are leaving the arena or a horse loses sight of the others while on a trail ride. Never separate or leave a horse alone on the trail or let one get very far behind without explicit direction from all instructors participating. Horses like their personal space and some do not like to be close to other horses. For safety, it is recommended that you keep at least one horse’s length between horses when riding or leading within a group. This maintains respect of the horse’s space and pecking order.

## **GLOSSARY OF PHYSICAL AND COGNITIVE DISABILITIES**

The following are brief, non-medical descriptions of some disabilities and conditions of participants that one might encounter in an equine assisted activity and therapy setting. This is not intended to be a comprehensive explanation of specific disabilities. Rather, it is a general overview with an explanation of how equine assisted activities and therapy can be beneficial.

**ARTHRITIS:** Inflammatory disease of the joints. Types: Osteo, rheumatoid and juvenile rheumatoid. Characteristics: Pain, lack of mobility, loss of strength.

*Benefits:* Gentle rhythmic movements to promote joint mobility and to relieve pain: increase strength.

**AUTISM & PERVASIVE DEVELOPMENT DISORDER (PDD):** A broad spectrum of disorders ranging from mild to severe, which affects thought, perceptions and attention. Characteristics: Impairments in social interaction and communication, restricted and repetitive patterns of behavior, interests and activities, impairments in the use of nonverbal behaviors such as eye to eye gaze and facial expressions, lack of social or emotional reciprocity, delays in or lack of the development of spoken language, impairments in ability to initiate or sustain conversations with others abnormal responses to senses such as sight, hearing, touch, balance, smell taste, reaction to pain, deficits in gross and fine motor skills.

*Benefits:* Provides sensory input and promotes sensory integration. Promotes communication skills (expressive and receptive). Develops strength, coordination, muscle tone and gross and fine motor skills. Promotes socialization.

**CEREBRAL PALSY:** Brain damage occurring before, at or shortly after birth. It is a non-progressive motor disorder. Types and characteristics: Spastic, decreased or increased muscle tone, muscle imbalances and equilibrium. Increased startle reflex and other pathological reflexes. Athetoid: Extensor muscle tension, involuntary movements, difficulty maintaining upright posture. Ataxic: weakened muscles, poor balance, and difficulty with quick, fine movements.

*Benefits:* Normalization of muscle tone, muscle strengthening, development of posture, balance and motor coordination, opportunity for promotion expressive skills, socialization and confidence.

**CEREBRAL VASCULAR ACCIDENT (CVA) – STROKE:** Brain hemorrhage or brain emboli, which causes varying degrees of functional impairment. Characteristics: Flaccid or spastic paralysis of arm and leg on same side of the body. May impair thought, speech, sight, balance, coordination and strength.

*Benefits:* Promotes symmetry, stimulates balance, posture, motor planning, speech, socialization and confidence.

**DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES (DD):** A diverse group of physical, cognitive, psychological, sensory and speech impairments that begin anytime during development up to 18 years of age. Characteristics: Varied, but can include processing delays, and delays in physical, motor and social development.

*Benefits:* Increase confidence and self-esteem, stimulates processing, speech and body awareness, provides opportunity for sport and recreation, promotes socialization.

**DOWN SYNDROME:** A genetic disorder in which a person is born with an extra chromosome (chromosome 21). Characteristics: Mild to severe learning disabilities, low muscle tone, speech impairments.

*Benefits:* Promotes expressive and receptive language skills. Increases gross and fine motor skills, balance, and coordination, posture and muscle tone. Promotes social skills. Increases confidence and self esteem.

**EMOTIONAL DISABILITIES:** Social, emotional or behavioral functioning which is not age appropriate and affects a child's academics, social relationships and self-care. Characteristics: Difficulty coping with everyday life situations and interpersonal relations, inappropriate affect or behavior responses, depression, anxiety, physical symptoms, difficulty learning, withdrawal, and aggressiveness.

*Benefits:* Increase confidence and self-esteem, provide opportunities for accomplishments, promotes positive socialization.

**HEARING IMPAIRMENT:** Congenital or acquired hearing loss varying from mild to profound. Characteristics; Difficulties in communication or communication through sign language, lip reading or finger spelling.

*Benefits:* Increases confidence, self-esteem and sense of accomplishment. Provides recreational activity with opportunity for socialization, stimulates balance, posture and coordination.

**LEARNING DISABILITIES:** Neurological disorders that interfere with a persons' ability to store, process or produce information. Characteristics: Difficulties with reading, writing, speech, computing math. May affect development and social skills.

*Benefits:* Promotes processing, language skills and attending skills, increases confidence and self-esteem, provides opportunity for success, increases balance, coordination and posture, provides opportunity for socialization.

**MENTAL IMPAIRMENT OR MENTAL RETARDATION (MR):** A disorder in which a persons overall intellectual functioning is below average with an IQ of 70 or less. Impaired ability to cope with common life demands and daily living skills. Characteristics: Impairments in learning, communication, social interactions, self-care.

*Benefits:* Increases balance, coordination, strength and posture, improves gross and fine motor skills, promotes socialization, increases confidence, reinforce life and vocational skills.

**MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS (MS):** Progressive neurological disease with degeneration of spinal column tracts, resulting in scar formation. Characteristics: Most commonly occurs in the 20 to 40 year old range. It is progressive with periods of exacerbation and remissions. Symptoms include weakness, visual impairment, fatigue, loss of coordination and emotional sensitivity.

*Benefits:* Maintains and strengthens weak muscles, maintains balance, increases confidence and self-esteem.

**MUSCULAR DYSTROPHY (MD):** Deficiency in muscle nutrition with degeneration of skeletal muscle. Hereditary disease that mainly affects males. Characteristics: Progressive muscular weakness, fatigues easily, sensitive to temperature extremes.

*Benefits:* Provides opportunity for recreational, physical, and social activity. May help slow progressive loss of strength, stimulates postural and trunk alignment, allows for movement free of assistive devices.

**PRADER-WILLI SYNDROME:** A complex non-hereditary birth defect resulting from an abnormality on the 15th chromosome. Characteristics: PWS typically causes low muscle tone, short stature, incomplete sexual development, and a chronic feeling of hunger that, coupled with a metabolism that utilizes drastically fewer calories than normal, can lead to excessive eating and life-threatening obesity. Intellectual, social and motor deficits also exist.

*Benefits:* Exercise to combat calorie intake, social interaction, and strengthening of weak muscles.

**SCOLIOSIS:** Lateral curve of the spine with a C or S shape with rotary component. Characteristics: Shoulder, trunk and waistline asymmetry. May have back pain and postural fatigue.

*Benefits:* Stimulates postural symmetry, strengthens trunk muscles.

**SPINA BIFIDA:** Congenital failure of vertebral arch closure which results in spinal cord damage. Characteristics: Varying degrees of paralysis of the lower limbs coupled with sensory loss. May also be associated with hydrocephalus, scoliosis and hip dislocations.

*Benefits:* Stimulates posture and balance, increases strength, balance and coordination, promotes confidence and self-esteem.

**SPINAL CORD INJURY (SCI):** Trauma to the spinal cord resulting in a loss of neurological function. Characteristic: Paralysis of muscles below the level of injury – can be flaccid or spastic. Fatigue, sensory loss and pressure sores.

*Benefits:* Stimulates posture and balance, strengthens trunk muscles, and provides opportunity for recreational and social activity.

**TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY (TBI):** Accidental injury to the head resulting in impairment of cognitive, emotional and/or physical functioning. Characteristics: May include deficits in gross and fine motor skills, balance, coordination and strength. May have deficits in language, communication, processing, memory and perceptual skills.

*Benefits:* Stimulates balance, posture, coordination, and gross and fine motor skill. Stimulates speech and perceptual skills. Increases confidence.

**VISUAL IMPAIRMENT – MODERATE TO TOTAL LOSS OF SIGHT:**

Characteristic: May include insecure posture, lack of visual memory, anterior center of gravity and fearfulness.

*Benefits:* Stimulates spatial awareness, proprioception, posture, balance and coordination. Provides opportunity for socialization, structured risk-taking and freedom of movement.