



BLUE SKY

Therapeutic Riding & Respite

**Blue Sky Rider/PURPOSE Partner
Handbook
2024**

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Welcome to the Blue Sky Family,

We are so happy our paths have crossed! We want you to know that you are valued and you are seen. Whether you are a client, or you are caring for a client you are important!

You will hear three words at Blue Sky a lot...**Safe, Happy and Healthy.** All three words are equally important and if one is missing then that means something is broken. Every rule, guideline, program, project or event is run through these three filters to ensure that the goal of providing a safe, happy and healthy therapeutic community for all is being carried out.

It is important to us that you are comfortable and feel at home while you are at Blue Sky. This place exists for you...the client, the parent, the sibling, the caregiver, the volunteer...every single person is of equal importance. This is a family, and that means that everyone has a place at the table.

We know the financial burden that therapies and programs can create. It is our goal to keep lessons, camps and programs as reasonable as possible for our families. We know that sometimes financial assistance is needed, and we try very hard to help where needed. We simply ask that each family does the very best that they can, and if assistance is needed we ask that you pitch in volunteering when needed.

Sometimes in a family there are miscommunications, misunderstandings, disagreements and differences of opinions. If any of these arise we ask that you first not jump to conclusions, and talk to the person you may not be seeing eye to eye. If this does not create a resolution then we ask that you please come to me or any one of our board members to help seek a solution. We want everyone to be heard!

We hope that you enjoy your time at Blue Sky! We are really happy you are here.

Sincerely,



Amy Gayhart
Blue Sky Therapeutic Riding & Respite, Board President and Executive Director

The Blue Sky Story

Founded in 2010, Blue Sky Therapeutic Riding & Respite was created as a comprehensive program to help individuals with disabilities and their families. We serve individuals with autism, physical, cognitive & emotional disabilities and their siblings, parents and caretakers. Blue Sky has helped many special needs individuals build confidence, increase cognitive ability, improve motor skills and gain valuable life & job skills. Care for our clients extends to community resource referrals, training and education.

Beyond the saddle, opportunities and programming for special needs adults is provided in the PURPOSE Program. PURPOSE Program Partners (clients) participate in PURPOSE Mercantile, PURPOSE Produce and Barn Management and the SILO. By learning life & job skills from gardening, culinary arts, design & build projects, retail & customer service, animal husbandry and partnering with local non-profits to do good works in the community, our Partners thrive, grow and become empowered.

Blue Sky is a place of respite, strength and resources for families living the day-to-day challenges of raising a special needs child or caring for a family member into adulthood. Our goal is to serve our community with these programs at minimal cost to our families. Through grants, fundraising events, community involvement and individual donations Blue Sky programs continue to expand and serve a vital need.

We value the dedication, love and countless hours of work of our founder, Julie Coady, to make this organization what it is today. She is forever our founder and forever our friend.

Our Mission:

To provide a safe, happy and healthy therapeutic community that works to empower and propel our special needs citizens and their families to their fullest potential. We serve our valued clients by providing therapeutic horseback riding, respite, vocational training and entrepreneurial opportunities.

Our Vision:

- **Horses**
To grow our therapeutic horsemanship program not only in the number of instructors but also in our level of certification and quality of facilities which will allow us to serve a larger portion of our special needs community and our current riders at the highest level.
- **Hope**
By providing our citizens and their families with hope and security for their future, it will allow them the opportunity to flourish and find their voice they so dearly deserve.
- **Housing**
Work to create purposeful, quality, and affordable long term housing solutions for our clients.

Our Values:

Safe

Happy

Healthy

Our Programs

2 programs working towards 1 goal, a safe, happy, healthy community for all abilities.

1. Therapeutic Horseback Riding
 2. PURPOSE Program - Day Program, PURPOSE Mercantile & SILO
-

Texas State Equine Liability Law

UNDER TEXAS LAW (CHAPTER 87, CIVIL PRACTICE AND REMEDIES CODE), AN EQUINE PROFESSIONAL IS NOT LIABLE FOR AN INJURY TO OR THE DEATH OF A PARTICIPANT IN EQUINE ACTIVITIES RESULTING FROM THE INHERENT RISKS OF EQUINE ACTIVITIES.

For more information, please visit <https://guides.sll.texas.gov/animal-law/livestock>

Non-Discrimination Policy

Blue Sky provides equal employment opportunities to all employees and applicants regardless of a person's race, religion, color, sex, age, national origin, disability, veteran status, or any other legally protected status. Employees with disabilities should inform the Administrative Director of their need and will be provided with reasonable accommodations.

Harassment or discrimination of any kind is not tolerated, including behavior, comments, jokes, slurs, e-mail messages, pictures, photographs, or other conduct that contributes to an intimidating or offensive environment. Harassment and discrimination includes conduct based on race, color, religion, age, sex, pregnancy, physical or mental disability, national origin, ancestry, medical condition, veteran status, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, genetic information, or any other non-job-related factor.

Eligibility Criteria

Clients over the age of 5 with a variety of diagnosis from Autism to PTSD. Clients range from highly functioning, in need of safe social interaction, to those who will need full-time care for the rest of their lives. Some have regulatory challenges and are prone to difficult behaviors and outbursts. At Blue Sky, we understand that it is difficult for their families to find full day programs that stimulate, engage, and provide a feeling of community. Our goal is to be that community and safe space for every client we serve. Upon enrollment into our program, we will have a consultation with the family to learn how we can best serve you.

Client Program Fees

- Blue Sky Therapeutic Riding & Respite is a non-profit organization. We raise funds in a variety of ways to help reduce the cost for our clients. **The suggested lesson fee for therapeutic horseback riding is \$40 per lesson.** This amount only covers about 30% of the actual cost to run one lesson. Scholarships are made available by application. Blue Sky makes it a priority to never turn away a client due to inability to pay. Scholarship families can help offset scholarship costs through volunteerism and participating with fundraisers.
- **Blue Sky Riding Lesson payments are paperless.**
 - You can pay online on the www.blueskytexas.org website under the Client Payments tab.
 - If you aren't able to use the online method, then please make a check payable to Blue Sky Therapeutic Riding and Respite.
 - Blue Sky Riding Instructors do not take cash for payment.
- **Our PURPOSE program runs from 9:00-2:00 and costs \$25/day.** There are currently no scholarships available for our PURPOSE program. Starting in January 2022, we will begin billing each client for the entire month...either by 1 day, 2 day, or 3 days a week...not by individual days attended. This is an effort to guarantee payment even for last minute cancellations and sickness. For any absences with a 7 day advance notice your days will be prorated. With notice we are able to invite someone from our waitlist to join us for the days your child/client will be gone.
- **Our Fun Friday PURPOSE program runs from 10:00-1:00 and is free to all who wish to attend.**

Attire

Clients in our therapeutic riding & driving program should dress appropriately for the weather, and in clothing that does not restrict movement or vision. Appropriate trousers/pants for horseback riding include jeans, riding breeches, sweat pants, or leggings. All riders must wear protective footwear; a leather boot is recommended or another closed-toed shoe that will not hold sand from the arena. Parents/Guardians, family, and caretakers who wish to participate in the riders lesson must also wear protective footwear.

Please respect the following guidelines:

- No open toed shoes of any style
- No dangling jewelry
- No perfume (attracts bugs/some participants may have allergies)
- Modest shorts are permitted
- No obscene logos
- Shirts that bare the midriff are not allowed

Please keep in mind that BSTR&R is a professional organization and may often have unannounced visits or media opportunities. Please dress comfortably yet sensibly.

Clients in the PURPOSE program must also be ready to spend time out on the farm, so closed toe shoes are a must. Also, be prepared with appropriate clothing due to changing weather conditions.

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Safety Rules

Safety for our participants, volunteers, staff and visitors are of the utmost concern. BSTR&R horses are incredibly trained to work with many distractions, however they are still animals with a strong flight instinct. Working around horses is a risk activity. Staff and volunteers review and practice safety and emergency procedures on a regular basis.

- No running, loud outbursts, throwing rocks, or other behavior that may startle a horse.
- No Smoking, use of tobacco, or e-cigarettes anywhere on the property
- All minors must be supervised. No running, pushing, yelling, climbing the rails, stairs or ramp.
- Driveway speed limit is posted at 10 mph. This speed limit is strictly enforced.
- Keep dogs leashed at all times and away from our riding arena, tacking and mounting areas. If a dog barks or is aggressive in any way we ask that you please leave your animal at home. This is for the safety of all clients, staff and volunteers. Aggressive dogs could possibly spook the horses.
- Visitors are always welcome during business hours in the observation area of the facility. If visitors would like more information about BSTR&R or a tour of the entire facility, please arrange this with an Instructor or staff member in advance of your visit. You are responsible for your guests.
- The barn is a busy place during lesson times. For your safety and the safety of others, please do not congregate in the barn, in front of the barn, or in the pathway leading from the barn to the grooming, tacking, and mounting area. These areas need to remain clear for staff and horses. Only staff and trained volunteers are allowed in the barn, paddocks, and arena.
- Respect the privacy of client private lesson times by keeping a safe distance, and give an appropriate amount of time after the previous client has finished their lesson before entering the barn. Client's lessons continue even while in the barn, and it is respectful to give that client their full time.
- Only essential personnel can be in the mounting area during the mount. All other persons should be clear of the area. The instructor will decide which persons need to be included in the mounting/dismounting process.
- Keep the work area clean and free of tripping obstacles.
- Only one rider at a time on the mounting ramp. Other riders should wait in the designated viewing area until called to mount their horse.
- All spectators should be in the designated viewing areas for viewing lessons. These areas include, but are not necessarily limited to, the arena patio, the Purpose Room, and the PURPOSE Patio. When viewing from outside the Arena, please do not stand, jump, or pull on the fence. It can break with enough force and create safety hazards.
- Blue Sky is committed to welcoming clients of all abilities and that does include some clients with behaviors. If there is ever an emergency and you are asked to vacate the area, please report to the safety area (underneath the trees). The front gate will be closed for the client's safety. We ask that you remain on the west side of the gate until the situation has deescalated. An appointed volunteer, staff member or instructor will let you know when it is appropriate to enter the Blue Sky gate. Although we try our hardest to keep these situations from happening...the fact is they do happen. We ask that you have patience and respect for the client who is having a hard time, and their family.

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Code of Conduct

Thoughtful conduct and self-control factor into the safety and enjoyment of all participants. All persons at BSTR&R will be expected to adhere to the following code of conduct.

Respect for facility: no inappropriate use of the facilities, mailing lists or monies.

Respect for others: no disruptive or abusive behavior to the animals or people at BSTR&R.

Respect for the organization's rules, policies and procedures: Families are expected to conduct themselves in a cooperative and appropriate manner at all times. Examples of inappropriate behavior include: any form of harassment, aggressive or abusive behavior to self or others, including horses. Please notify staff immediately if you are subject to any inappropriate behavior. Individuals exhibiting inappropriate behavior will be requested to leave the property immediately and additional assistance may be called if deemed needed. Inappropriate behavior may result in dismissal from the program. Please notify staff immediately of any concerns regarding the behavior of program horses such as biting, kicking, etc

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Confidentiality Statement

Any information in regards to the participants of Blue Sky Therapeutic Riding and Respite including: participants, volunteers, and personnel shall remain privileged and confidential. This information may include but is not limited to any medical, social, personal, and/or financial information. Information concerning riders will be shared with volunteers on a need to know basis. Disclosure of any confidential information shall not be released to anyone not associated with BSTR&R. Volunteers must seek staff permission prior to taking any videos or photos.

Participant Illness

Participants are not permitted to take part in classes if they have:

- Nausea, vomiting and/or diarrhea within the past 24 hours.
- Severe persistent coughing or a severe cold.
- An oral temperature of 100 degrees or higher. Temperature should be stable for 24 hours before attending class.
- A contagious or exposed skin rash.
- Red, watery, burning eyes with either white or yellow drainage.
- A communicable disease such as head lice, strep throat, chickenpox, etc.

When Arriving to Blue Sky for your Scheduled Lesson:

- Please wait in your car until the previous lesson has been completed.
- Instructors will meet you at your car to guide you to your lesson area.

ATTENDANCE:

Horse Program:

Clients having regularly scheduled lesson times should give 24 hours notice for cancellations. Upon 3 cancellations without 24 hours notice, clients will be moved from a regularly scheduled lesson time to appointment only. If a

scheduled rider no-shows for their appointment a \$20 no-show fee will be applied to the rider's account. Riders on scholarship will lose their scholarship after 3 no-shows. Appointment only offerings will be given based upon schedule availability. If clients are frequently late to the scheduled lesson, an attempt to change their lesson time will be made, but if the schedule cannot accommodate right away, they will also be moved to by appointment scheduling until further notice.

PURPOSE Program:

- 3 no-shows without notice your child's spot will be made available to a new client.
- 6 absences within a 6 month period (non-medical related) will also allow your spot to be filled by a new client.

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Changing Your Lesson Time

Blue Sky makes every effort to accommodate schedule changes when necessary, however an ideal time cannot be guaranteed. Parents or riders should contact Olivia Distasio, Horse Program Director, as soon as a change is anticipated. Changes are processed based on the order they are received and the availability of open therapy sessions. Appointment only offerings will be given based upon schedule availability.

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Lesson Cancellation Policy and Weather Policy

While it is never ideal to cancel activities at Blue Sky, sometimes it may be necessary due to staff illness, inclement weather, or site emergencies. Amy Gayhart, Executive Director at Blue Sky, reserves the right to cancel any PURPOSE activities due to illness, weather, or emergency. Olivia Distasio, Horse Program Director, reserves the right to cancel scheduled Horse Program lessons due to inclement and threatening weather, low staffing/staff illness, and site emergencies. The Board of Directors also reserves the right to cancel lessons due to site emergencies and threatening weather.

Weather that threatens Blue Sky operations and is cause for canceling lessons is defined as:

- **Heat:** Blue Sky Therapeutic Riding and Respite makes every effort to hold lessons. However, while riders are riding for 30 to 60 minutes at a time the horses and instructor are exposed to heat up to 8 hours per day.

We look at many factors, including temperature. If the "real feel" temperature is 90-100 degrees, the parent/guardian and instructor may decide that it is too hot. Instructors have the flexibility to cancel one lesson at a time; e.g. hold morning lessons, but cancel afternoon lessons as temperature rises.

Please note, in addition to the accuweather.com readings, we also check the temperature in the arena. If the temperature is over 95 degrees, lessons will be canceled.

- **Rain:** If there is light or intermittent rain lessons will continue. If there is thunder/lightning the arena and barn area must be cleared immediately. Do not wait under structure overhangs. There is metal in the barns. Go to your car. If there is no thunder for 30 continuous minutes, lessons may continue.
- **Cold Weather:** Blue Sky will cancel lessons if it is 45 degrees or below. If you have any questions please feel free to contact us.

- **Wind:** Lessons will be canceled if there is a sustained wind of 15 miles per hour or if the National Weather Service issues a wind advisory.
- **Other:** For extreme weather conditions-floods tornadoes, etc. lessons are, of course, canceled. If you are unsure, call your instructor directly. Volunteers should also check with the instructor or Volunteer Coordinator if it is unclear.
- **PURPOSE:** If weather causes the PURPOSE program to be closed, you will be contacted by phone/text.

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Communication

It is important that the client and their families inform Blue Sky staff of the best form of communication for schedule updates and events. If this is text, email or phone call, please indicate in the application form.

Blue Sky Program Contact Information:

PURPOSE & SILO:

- Amy Gayhart: amy@blueskytexas.org / 469-450-9594

Horse Program:

- Olivia Distasio: olivia@blueskytexas.org / 469-600-9839

Volunteering:

- Olivia Distasio: wes@blueskytexas.org / 940-597-5164

Other ways you can keep in contact with Blue Sky include:

- **Electronic Newsletter-** The Blue Sky Newsletter is a great way to get updates and hear about amazing news in our community! The Newsletter is electronic and is sent via email.
- **Facebook and Instagram -** Please like BSTR&R on Facebook and Instagram for updates on the facility, rider progress, events, and more! Blue Sky can be followed at @blueskytherapeutic

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Client Records

Riders, or their guardians, are required to update their registration information and *Medical History Forms* annually (per PATH International standards). All Rider forms must be updated every year. Medical History Forms must be signed by the rider's Doctor or Medical Practitioner, or a renewal stating nothing has changed and the client may participate in equine therapy signed by their physician. Equine activities cannot begin until this form is turned into the Horse Program Director. Riders are not permitted to ride without up-to-date forms.

Initial: _____

Change of Health or Medication Status

Any change in riders health or medication status that could affect safety or health during equine activity must be updated on the riders Medical History Form and signed by their Doctor or Medical Practitioner. Failing to update riding instructors of a health or medication change could make the participant vulnerable to light to severe strain and minor/major injury. It is for safety that we ask to be updated.

Initial: _____

Scheduled Closing

The Blue Sky Therapeutic Riding and Respite Yearly Calendar is updated on the website and is the best way to know what is going on and when at Blue Sky. Please visit www.blueskytexas.org

Grounds for Dismissal

- Attendance issues, such as frequent absences or chronic tardiness without notification
- Sharing private information about clients
- Theft or other criminal behavior
- Sexual harassment and other discriminatory behavior
- Physical violence or threats against other clients, volunteers, employees and animals

Program Withdrawal

Clients may withdraw from the program by notifying the Executive Director or Horse Program Director in writing.

Initial: _____

Visitor Policy

Visitors are welcome to Blue Sky. Please consult the staff concerning the best time to visit Blue Sky. Visiting minors and children must be supervised by an adult at all times. Due to programming and scheduled lessons, it would be best for visitors to contact Blue Sky to set up an appointment for a meeting and a tour. Clients and families are welcome to bring visitors with them and give them tours of the property while they are at Blue Sky either for a lesson or to participate in PURPOSE and/or Fun Friday. Visitors must adhere to the same safety rules and dress code as our clients and families.

Initial: _____

Volunteer Program Acknowledgement

Volunteers are our heart! Blue Sky couldn't do what we do unless our volunteers do what they do. From coaching, to feeding horses, to mowing the property, to helping in the garden...all of these are tasks done by a team of volunteers that are second to none. There is always room for help and we would love to have you a part of the Blue Sky family. Parents, Guardians, and Family are all encouraged to volunteer if you wish to do so. Volunteers should always be treated with the utmost respect and gratitude.

Board of Directors

- **Amy Gayhart, President** - amy@blueskytexas.org
- **Kristen Kromer, Secretary** - kristenkromer@gmail.com
- **Beverly Aten** - bevaten@gmail.com
- **Duane Sutton** - duane.sutton@screen-spe.com

- **Kim Groff** - kgroff4@gmail.com
- **Jenny Garcia** - jenny@blueskytexas.org

Parent/Guardian Policy Acknowledgement and Acceptance Form

All rules, policies, and procedures have been reviewed and approved by the Blue Sky Therapeutic Riding and Respite Board of Directors.

I understand and agree to follow all rules, policies, and procedures outlined in the Blue Sky Therapeutic Riding and Respite Parent/Guardian Handbook.

Parent/Guardian Signature

Date: _____