MARCH 2024

VOLUNTEER MANUAL

// BLUE SKY THERAPEUTIC RIDING & RESPITE

Prepared by: AMY GAYHART

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.

INTRODUCTION

During your time at Blue Sky you will hear three little words over and over again:

SAFE // HAPPY // HEALTHY

These three words are our overall goal here at Blue Sky. Safe, happy and healthy are not words only for our riders, but for our rider's families, horses, staff and our valuable volunteers.

We hope your experience at Blue Sky will bring you satisfaction, personal growth and fulfillment.

VISION

To grow our therapeutic horsemanship program not only in 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.

By providing our citizens and their families hope and security for their future, it will allow them the opportunity to flourish and find their voice they so dearly deserve.

To grow our PURPOSE program and develop vocational & entrepreneurial opportunities in a structured environment...each component allowing the other to thrive and succeed.

BACKGROUND

Blue Sky Therapeutic Riding and Respite was founded in 2010 to develop a comprehensive program for individuals with disabilities as well as siblings, parents and caretakers.

Blue Sky's Therapeutic Horse Program helps special needs individuals gain confidence, improve motor skills, cognitive ability and gain valuable life skills. Blue Sky offers the opportunity for riders of all abilities to compete in special events. We are creating an environment to teach life skills, offer the ability to participate in events such as horse shows, Special Olympics and offer referrals to community resources, as well as assist and offer support and respite to all members of a family with special needs children.

We want Blue Sky to become a place of respite, strength and resources for families living the day-to-day challenges of raising a special needs child.

Our goal is to serve this growing need in our community with these programs at minimal or low cost to our families. In addition, we will look to positive and proactive fundraising events and donations to help this community resource continue to expand and serve a vital need. We value the dedication, love and countless hours of work our founder, Julie Coady, put in to making this organization what it is today.

BLUE SKY ENVIRONMENT

There are many things that set us apart from other therapeutic riding centers. We believe in serving the entire family and not just the special needs citizens. Many times, the siblings of special needs children get overlooked when in fact they need of special attention as well. We want them to feel included in all that we do.

In order to keep a positive and happy environment for all, we make sure that we are all using the proper terminology when referring to our riders. Many clients are over the age of 18; referring to them as kids and children is demeaning to them. We should refer to all of Blue Sky's clients as either riders, clients, citizens, friends or partners.

Blue Sky is a family, and we are well aware that families do not always get along and agree with each other. To keep disagreements to a minimum, we ask that you speak directly to the person who has offended you before speaking to anyone else regarding the issue. All volunteers must be open to having healthy conversations rather than making quick judgments and conclusions. It is important that everyone is heard, and they know their thoughts and opinions are valued. Concerns that are brought to light should never be discounted, but rather be heard and given an explanation.

We value and welcome you as a member of the Blue Sky team! We invite your recommendations and ideas on how to improve our programs. While growing and improving our programs is exciting it is important to remember that progress takes time and changes may not always be made immediately. As a board lead organization, it may take time to get ideas approved by our Board of Directors. We ask for your patience as our volunteer led Board of Directors coordinate their schedules, jobs and families while finding time to serve our organization.

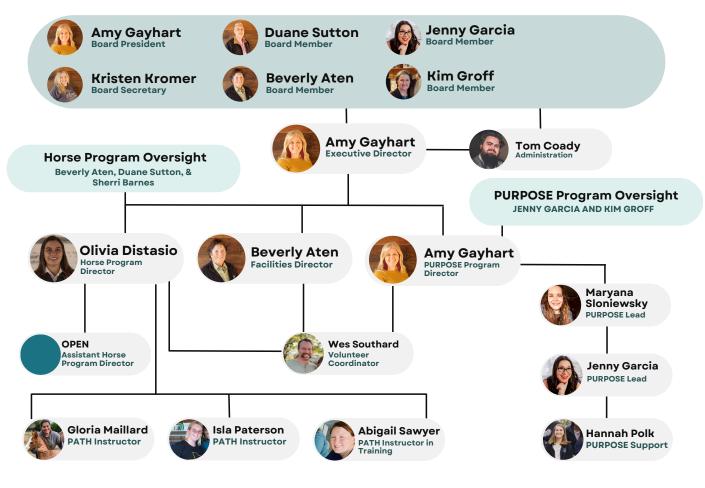
While remembering our mission and vision, if you have an issue with any of Blue Sky's policies, staff members or other volunteers we ask that you approach your direct supervisor with your concerns. 99% of the time issues can be resolved with common sense and kindness. If you are not able to reach an agreement with your direct supervisor, we ask that you approach the next level of supervision as outlined in our organizational chart below.

Words, tone of voice, and facial expressions should never be expressed in a way that would be demeaning or belittling. Everyone at Blue Sky should be spoken to in a respectful manner.

BLUE SKY ENVIRONMENT (CONT.)

As an organization when problems or issues arise, we ask that you briefly put yourself in one of our Blue Sky family's shoes for one day. They are forced to handle life threatening illnesses, behavioral issues, government and waiver programs, countless doctors and appointments and they handle all of it with grace and love. We find that this tends to put our issues into perspective, and we realize that the issues we see as "crucial" is actually minor in the big scheme of things.

BLUE SKY THERAPEUTIC RIDING & RESPITE ORGANIZATIONAL CHART





THERAPEUTIC RIDING V. HIPPOTHERAPY

Therapeutic Riding

Therapeutic riding lessons are equestrian skill-based lessons for children and adults with disabilities. The focus of these lessons is horsemanship skill development and progression, while also improving the rider's physical, cognitive and emotional and/or social skills.

These lessons are taught by a PATH certified therapeutic riding instructor, with the assistance of quality volunteer aids. As much as possible, riders participate in pre-mounted and post-mounted horse care. Below are some of the benefits these lessons can provide:

Physical Benefits:

- Strengthen muscles
- Improve muscle coordination and motor skills
- Improve balance
- Improve posture
- Increase endurance

Social and Emotional Benefits:

- Self-esteem
- Self-confidence
- Social and Communication Skills
- Relationship Building
- Overcoming Fear and Anxiety

Cognitive Benefits:

- Following Multi-Step Directions
- Staying on Task
- Horsemanship Skills
- Valuable Life Skills

THERAPEUTIC RIDING V. HIPPOTHERAPY (CONT.)

HIPPOTHERAPY

Hippotherapy is a form of therapy that uses the horse's movement as a means to achieve therapy goals. The movement promotes active responses in the rider and facilitates activation of postural control, balance, and motor and sensory systems. The sessions are conducted by licensed Physical, Occupational or Speech therapists and assisted by a certified therapeutic riding instructor and quality volunteer aids.

Although during these lessons, the focus is not on horsemanship skill development, the rider will often times participate in therapeutic riding as well. Examples of some issues that can be addressed

during a hippotherapy session are listed below:

- Abnormal muscle tone
- Postural asymmetry
- Abnormal reflexes
- Impaired balance
- Decreased coordination
- Impaired sensorimotor function
- Decreased trunk mobility
- Abnormal limb function

SCOPE OF SERVICES/ DEMOGRAPHICS

Blue Sky has clients vary in ages from 5 to 65 years old 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 outbursts such as an Autistic meltdown. Their families are challenged to find full-day care that stimulates, engages, and provides a feeling of community such as Blue Sky.

Current client demographics include but are not limited to:

- Autism
- Down's Syndrome
- Cerebral Palsy
- Developmental Delay
- ADHD/ADD
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Multiple Sclerosis
- Paralysis
- Traumatic Brain Injury

Providing services to able bodied clients should be strictly kept to those that are siblings of special needs clients or those who have shown significant volunteer presence and dedication to the well being of Blue Sky. It is imperative that we reserve our horses and time of our staff to those who have trouble finding services elsewhere.

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VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES// Blue sky horse program

All therapeutic horseback riding lessons at Blue Sky are taught by a PATH certified riding instructor and assisted by trained staff and volunteers.

At Blue Sky we have developed 3 different levels of volunteer opportunities relating to our horse program. No one level is more important than the other...all 3 are vital to the success of Blue Sky. The only difference in the 3 levels is the amount of training that has taken place in order to do specific jobs and the level of horse knowledge and experience. The Blue Sky volunteer coordinator will let you know which level for which you qualify. There is some level of training you will be required to do to move to different levels unless otherwise decided by the volunteer coordinator.

// Level A Opportunities: (requites no horse knowledge in order to volunteer)

- Barn Maintenance (which includes, lawn upkeep, manure pick up in pastures, cleaning of tack, barn clean up etc.)
- Administrative (word processing, data entry and other day to day responsibilities that coordinating a horse program requires)
- Special Events/Horse Shows (serve on event committees and assist with various fundraising activities and horse shows throughout the year)
- Special Skills (Many volunteers come with special skills such as photography, computer skills, social media expertise and grant writing for example. We encourage you to share those talents with us and help us find the perfect spot for you.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES// Blue sky horse program (cont.)

// Level B Opportunities: (requires minimal to basic horse knowledge)

- Helping with morning and evening feedings of the horses (this requires a feeding course before moving forward)
- Side Walkers (walk beside the horse in lessons and provide physical and/or emotional support to the rider. They help the rider to successfully reach their lesson goals, as well as ensure rider safety before, during and after the lesson.)
- Horse Helpers (work with the Blue Sky staff to assist with horse care, grooming, feeding, and cleaning stalls and paddocks. While these are not glamorous jobs, it is vital for the care of our very important horses)

// Level C Volunteer: (requires considerable to advanced horse knowledge)

- Horse Handler/Leader
- Behind the scenes team at horse shows
- Help with transportation of horses.
- Administer medication to horses
- Move horses from pasture to pasture

VOLUNTEER MANUAL

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VOLUNTEER REQUIREMENTS // Horse program

// Background Check

We are required to run background checks on all people who volunteer at Blue Sky. This can get very expensive. In order to keep our cost down and make sure we are not spending money on someone who is not planning on volunteering for long, we ask that each new volunteer donate \$20 to Blue Sky in order to help cover the cost of their background check. We will keep track of your start date and after 6 months of volunteering you will be reimbursed your \$20.

// Sign-In and Recording Hours

Every volunteer will need to sign-in/clock-in to keep track of attendance and hours volunteered. This not only helps Blue Sky for funding purposes, but also so that we can recognize, you, our wonderful volunteers! Name tags with first and last names will also be required for each volunteer to wear during their time spent at Blue Sky. You can pick up and put back name tags at the same location where you sign in.

// Attendance and Arrival Time

For the safety of our riders we can't proceed with lessons until the proper amount of volunteers are in attendance; regular and punctual attendance is so important! We ask that you arrive 20 minutes prior to the lesson for which you are assisting. This will allow time to sign-in and to assist in having the horse brought to the barn and any last minute instructions or adjustments to tack.

If you are sick or planning to miss a scheduled volunteer opportunity we ask that you give the volunteer coordinator plenty of notice in order to contact someone to take your place. We completely understand that last minute emergencies happen, just please be respectful of the time others have committed to making the lesson take place.



VOLUNTEER REQUIREMENTS // Horse program (cont.)

// Confidentiality Policy

Any information in regards to the participants of Blue Sky Therapeutic Riding & Respite including: participants, volunteers, and staff 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 pictures or videos.

// Conduct and Behavior

Volunteers 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.

VOLUNTEER REQUIREMENTS // Horse program (cont.)

Volunteer Dress CODE

Volunteers should dress appropriately for the weather, and in clothing that does not restrict movement or vision. All volunteers must wear protective footwear; a leather boot is recommended or another close-toed shoe that will not hold sand from the arena.

- Please respect the following guidelines:
- No open-toed shoes of any style

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- No dangling jewelry
- No perfume (attracts bugs/some participants may have allergies)
- No halter tops/tube tops
- Modest shorts are permitted, but not recommended due to biting insects
- No obscene logos

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

// Volunteer Forms

At the back of this book you will find all of our volunteer forms that must be signed and turned in to the Blue Sky office prior to volunteering.

- Medical Form
- Release of Liability
- Background Check

GENERAL HORSE KNOWLEDGE, SAFETY AND GUIDELINES

// SOME DO'S AND DON'TS

- Prior to approaching our horses, speak to them so as not to startle them. Always approach from the side; never to walk directly at them or behind them. Never run up to them, or chase after them.
- When speaking to our horses pay attention to your tone; use a cool, calm/soothing voice, or when necessary a firm, assertive voice.
- Although it is preferred that you try to only walk around the front of a horse when moving from one side to the other, if the horse is tied to a wall, trailer, fence etc. walk around the back of the horse. Please do not duck under the neck and/or tied rope, or step over a lead rope. When walking around the back of a horse, always keep one hand on its rump while speaking to it as you come around. This is so that the horse, which cannot see directly behind itself, will always be aware of your location.
- Always be aware or where your feet are and the horse's feet are. In the event a horse does step on your foot, reposition the horse to move off of it, versus trying to pull your foot out from under it's hoof.
- With the exception of certain mounting procedures and handling exercises, avoid standing directly in front of the horse. If and when they are startled, they may jump forward.
- Please avoid petting and playing with our horses noses and faces. Both are very sensitive for them and over handling of these areas can cause bad habits such as biting and nipping. If you would like to pet them, please stroke or lightly pat along the neck or shoulder. Heavy patting or slapping is also undesirable when showing affection.



GENERAL HORSE KNOWLEDGE, SAFETY AND GUIDELINES

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- Treat feeding is allowed, but only with the instructor's permission. If you bring treats with you, please avoid allowing the horse to see them, smell them or hear the bag you brought them in, prior to asking the instructor if feeding is ok. Focus is a big part of their job as therapy horses, and if they are busy looking for treats, they are not paying attention to their riders or surroundings.
- If at any time you see something about a horse that does not look normal to you, please find an instructor or staff member immediately to take a closer look.
- Horses can display unpleasant behaviors such as nipping or leg lifting. Your instructor will handle these behaviors and guide volunteers how best to be safe. If you have any concerns please let your instructor know. We ask that you only participate in activities that feel safe for you.
- Please remember to close gates behind you when entering or leaving the horse pastures.

BLUE SKY Horse program (cont.)

// INCIDENT REPORT

Incidents include but are not limited to behavioral outbursts that include swearing, physical contact, a fall from a horse or significant injury. Verbal communication with parents will be sufficient for all minor incidents or injuries.

The Blue Sky Incident Form is included at the conclusion of this manual and is available digitally via email from the Horse Program Director or Executive Director.

// VOLUNTEER COORDINATION

Volunteers are key to our mission from client services to horse care and grounds keeping. Volunteer outreach is conducted through online portals, special events and social media. Volunteers may come from corporate, civic, university, school district and community service sources.

Each volunteer is unique with their own skills and experiences. We try to match volunteers with tasks that fit their talents. Our goal is to provide a welcoming learning experience for all volunteers regardless of background.

It would be challenging to present them with every scenario during a 2 hour volunteer training. We often have "teaching" moments throughout their time at Blue Sky. With an "each one teach one" approach, instructors train regularly consistent volunteers, who, in turn, assist in bringing along the new volunteers.



BLUE SKY Horse program (cont.)

// Key Volunteers

Key volunteers include leaders and sidewalkers for the Horse Program lessons. These volunteers' skills can be verified/confirmed by the Volunteer Coordinator who will work to ensure that each client has a leader and/or sidewalker(s) if needed.

If a volunteer no-shows or behaves in an inappropriate manner, please email the Volunteer Coordinator with the date and description of the behavior.

On occasion there may be a shortage of volunteers due to illness, vacation or emergency. The Volunteer Coordinator will reach out to emergency substitute volunteers for help. In this instance, if no other staff or volunteers are available, the instructor may choose to form an alternate, unmounted lesson plan or cancel the lesson all together. These instances are rare, but the instructor should have a backup plan for non-riding activities just in case.



BLUE SKY Horse program (cont.)

If it is necessary to cancel due to lack of volunteers, a makeup lesson time may be offered for an alternate time. See the previous section concerning scheduling.

Volunteer activities may include but are not limited to:

- Facility maintenance
- Feeding the animals
- Side-walking
- Grooming
- Horse Handler/Leader

// HORSE CARE & TRAINING

Blue Sky Horses are key to the Horse Program's success. To provide them with the best of care we approach their management with our // Safe //Healthy //Happy code. Our horses receive regular exercise & worming, healthy nutrition, massage, dentistry, regular vet check-ups, a consistent trim cycle and chiropractic care when needed.

The foundation of the exercise program is stretchy long walks with a balanced rider. To ensure the horses' joints last and their career is not shortened due to lameness we do not ask them to perform difficult or challenging tasks during their schooling. When the lesson plan involves poles or cavaletti the horses must always be splinted or polo wrapped and booted to protect them from bruising.

BLUE SKY Horse program (cont.)

Due to not having a deep dirt/sand arena we will not ask the horses to do reining work that would jeopardize their tendons.

Healthy nutrition is provided individually per horse to meet their caloric and fat requirements. Horses that are easy keepers might not have grain throughout the year, excluding severe cold weather, and may be kept on pasture and hay. Horses with higher caloric needs will have grain and oil in their diet, as well as hay, to keep them at an ideal weight throughout the year. The number of feedings per day may vary per the temperatures with a minimum of one feeding to provide the supplements. Alfalfa cubes may be fed during the winter to replace lack of pasture. All horses must have access to hay and fresh water daily to maintain gut health.

Horses suffering from arthritis and/or inflammation will be given Aniprin and Turmeric. Please see the feed board inside the silver feed bin in the feed room for a detail of the feed per horse.

Massage is provided via volunteers with an electric massager and can be applied to all horses. Chiropractic care is facilitated on an as needed basis to the horses if they are showing stiffness or lameness.

Dental care is provided annually.

Worming is administered with a variation of the worming agent on a quarterly cycle.

Hoof trimming is conducted on a 4 week cycle.

BLUE SKY Horse program (cont.)

Blue Sky's veterinarian is:

La Mesa Veterinary Associates 8386 Farm to Market 455 E, Pilot Point, TX 76258 (940) 686-2118

If you have any questions, please contact the Horse Program Director. Always contact the Horse Program Director before calling the Veterinarian for an emergency situation.

// FACILITIES MAINTENANCE & CARE

Facilities should be kept clean and neat as possible for our guests and their safety. We are a community center and often host tours and visits from donors and supporters.

Daily chores include:

- Cleaning the barn aisle (if clients have asthma, please wait until they leave)
- Removing manure from common areas
- Dusting and cleaning the tack room
- Collecting & washing dishes in the common areas
- Trash removal
- Checking fencing for exposed wire that may cause injury

Locking up:

All horses, goats and bunnies should be checked to see that they have access to food, water and shelter.

All doors to the PURPOSE Room and Tack Room should be locked before leaving the premises. Double check that the electric gate closes behind you.

Additional activities:

- Mowing
- Weed eating

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PURPOSE is a day program for adults with special needs. At PURPOSE our partners (clients) participate in the following areas: R.I.S.E., Purpose Mercantile, Purpose Produce, and Barn Management. We use these four facets to teach job, social, and life skills in a fun and supportive community.



// FOUR FACETS OF OUR PURPOSE PROGRAM

- R.I.S.E- Teaches our PURPOSE partners to Reach a deeper understanding of their emotions, Independence of self-care by preparing meals and learning responsibilities, Social interaction with other partners and volunteers, and Equip in continuing education in fundamental math, sequencing, writing, money comprehension skills.
- **PURPOSE MERCANTILE** Our PURPOSE partners are given space to create beautiful branded products that people want to purchase with structured guidance to ensure success.
- **PURPOSE PRODUCE** Our PURPOSE partners are involved with in every step of the growing process of our vegetable, fruit and herb garden. The produce that is cultivated is used for our culinary lessons, specialty canned items, as well as our bath and body products.
- **BARN MANAGEMENT** Our partners are responsible for feeding and watering the goats and bunnies, as well as keeping their cage and pins clean. Moving hay bales, mucking stalls and filling grain bins for the horses.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES// PURPOSE PROGRAM

Our volunteers' main goal is to encourage partners in learning life skills and helping to develop their independence. Volunteers assist in building partners confidence and play an important role in the success of our program. The relationships formed during our PURPOSE program truly matter to our clients. We encourage consistent attendance so that our partners know what they can depend on and expect when they arrive at PURPOSE.

Volunteer activities may include but are not limited to:

- Support staff members & partners
- Prepare and assist in educational activities
- Teaching skills, some one on one instruction
- Assist in creating PURPOSE products
- Assist partners in the garden
- Assist partners in barn management
- Form relationships with clients and encourage them to do their very best.



VOLUNTEER Opportunities// Purpose program

Currently PURPOSE Program meets on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursdays from 9:00-2:00, and on Friday we have our Fun Friday program from 10:00-1:00. We encourage our volunteers and partners to bring their own snack and lunch every day. We have a full kitchen where lunches can be prepared.

//EXAMPLE OF A PURPOSE PROGRAM DAY

- 9:00 Welcome/RISE Work
- 9:30 Feed Goats and Bunnies
- 10:00 Snack Time/Individual Work
- 10:30 PURPOSE Mercantile Project (rotation 1)
- 11:00 Patio Games/Exercise
- 11:30 Garden Time
- 12:00 Lunch
- 12:30 Video/Free Time
- 1:00 PURPOSE Mercantile Project (rotation 2)
- 1:30 Wrap up projects for the day
- 1:45 Job Rotation
- 2:00 Pick Up

VOLUNTEER REQUIREMENTS // PURPOSE PROGRAM

//Volunteer Dress CODE

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Please respect the following guidelines:

- No open-toed shoes of any style
- No dangling jewelry
- No perfume (attracts bugs/some participants may have allergies)
- No halter tops/tube tops
- Modest shorts are permitted, but not recommended due to biting insects
- No obscene logos

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- Medical Form
- Release of Liability
- Background Check

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Our partners work towards employment in our very own PURPOSE Mercantile Silo. Our PURPOSE Mercantile products are sold in our PURPOSE Mercantile Silo on our Blue Sky property.

Our PURPOSE Silo is more than a gift shop, it is a place for our partners to work with needed support. Selling the products they make, serving coffee to our community and having a place that is theirs is all part of the safe, happy, and healthy environment that everyone desires.All proceeds from the Silo go directly to keeping the program fees affordable for our families.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES // SILO



Volunteers are a support system for our PURPOSE partners. Our goal is for our partners to have as much independence as possible, so volunteers are encouraged to give as little assistance as possible. Volunteers are their cheerleaders and safety net if they should need assistance.

Currently our SILO is opened Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays during PURPOSE hours (9:00-2:00) and one Saturday a month from (9:00-2:00). The Saturday dates are listed on our website. Prior to our SILO Saturday, the PURPOSE Program Director will send out a sign up link for those interested in helping with the SILO. There are typically two shifts **1.**) **9:00-1:30 and 2.**) **11:30-2:00**.

Volunteers assist our PURPOSE partners in the following:

- Greet customers / health checks
- Direct parking
- Making and serving coffee
- Selling products / point of sale
- Facilitate projects during "down time"
- Help keep partners engaged and on task

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AMY GAYHART, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR 469-450-9594

OLIVIA DISTASIO, HORSE PROGRAM DIRECTOR (469) 600-9839

WES SOUTHARD, VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR (940) 597-5164

MARYANA SLONIEWSKY, PURPOSE PROGRAM LEAD (832) 538-3226

JENNY GARCIA, PURPOSE PROGRAM LEAD (469) 233-0880

GLORIA MAILLARD, PATH CERTIFIED THERAPEUTIC RIDING INSTRUCTOR (707) 718-558

ABIGAIL SAWYER, PATH CERTIFIED THERAPEUTIC RIDING INSTRUCTOR (972) 214-6797

ISLA PATERSON, PATH CERTIFIED THERAPEUTIC RIDING INSTRUCTOR