



OATS

Offering Alternative Therapy with Smiles

OATS Volunteer Handbook

2026-2027

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Welcome!

We are so excited to welcome you to the OATS volunteer team. OATS is run entirely on grants, donations, sponsorships, and class fees. We rely on volunteers to care for the animals and facility, help in therapeutic classes, recruit new volunteers, and participate in fundraisers.

Our Mission

Founded in 1997 as Offering Alternative Therapy with Smiles, OATS is a 501 (c) 3 non-profit located in Ortonville, Michigan. As a volunteer-based organization, we are focused on promoting individuals' health, well-being, and happiness through equine-assisted services. Through the support of its instructors, dedicated volunteers,

and the community, OATS has grown to one of the largest programs of its type in Michigan.

Located on 40 beautiful acres., we offer several year-round programs designed to assist those with a variety of abilities and needs. Our program continues to evolve as we assess the needs of our participants and the needs of our community. Whether you are looking for specific horse-related activities, volunteer opportunities, or community outings, OATS is the place to be.

OATS enjoys a long-standing, cooperative relationship with several other non-profits, schools, and community organizations. Additionally, we provide several events each year that are open to the children and families of our community. Through these relationships and events, we can give back to those who support us.

Staff

1. Staff to know
 - a. Executive Director—Doug Rohrabough (doug.rohrabaugh@oatshrh.org; 586-209-7608)
 - b. Barn Manager—Katie Butler (barnmanager@oatshrh.org)
 - c. Barn Assistants—Michelle Castle, Grace Parker (summer)
 - d. Lead Instructor—Katie Paielli (katie.paielli@oatshrh.org)
 - e. Instructors—Rita O'Brien, Laura Murray, Katie Paielli, Michelle Castle, Grace Parker (summer)
 - f. Volunteer Coordinator—Kendra Rogers (Kendra.rogers@oatshrh.org; 810-412-8441) and Kathie Shannon (kshannon61@gmail.com)

Expectations

1. Physical Labor

Volunteers are important to the cleanliness and upkeep of our animals, shelters, yards, and barns. Volunteers may be asked to feed animals, lead horses, walk next to riders, clean stalls, clean the aisle, clean the chicken coops, fill water troughs, clean the observation room, or participate in grounds maintenance. As a volunteer, you have the right to decline any and all requests, and the OATS staff will work to help you find the right opportunity to help to the best of our ability.

2. Non-physical opportunities

We also have non-physical opportunities, including fundraising, event planning, administrative tasks, and community outreach. There are also opportunities to propose and implement additional programming.

3. Scheduling volunteer time

Volunteers should work with the volunteer coordinator, instructors for whose classes they would like to help, or the Barn manager to schedule times to come to the farm outside of class times or regular chore times. Volunteers should sign up for class and chore help on Wranglr.app online.

4. Volunteer updates/personal tours

The volunteer coordinator will communicate special needs via emails through wranglr.app. Please be sure to include contact information when you fill out your volunteer registration packet. Facebook is also a great source of information for events and special causes. Tours may be scheduled with the volunteer coordinator, Barn Manager, or Barn Assistants.

5. Volunteer sign-in and hours

If you need signed community service hours, you may let the Barn manager, Barn Assistants, or volunteer coordinator know, and they will facilitate signing paperwork.

6. Firearms

No firearms are permitted on the OATS property except by law enforcement or with specific permission.

7. Smoking/alcohol/drugs

There is NO smoking, drinking alcohol, or drug use permitted on OATS property.

8. Dress code

OATS does not have a specific dress code outside of wearing close-toed shoes, but we do strongly encourage dressing for the weather and with the understanding that you will be working with animals outside, so getting dirty is to be expected. If you are not wearing close-toed shoes (crocs do NOT count), you will not be permitted to work with animals.

9. Social media/media contact

Volunteers are encouraged to share social media posts made by OATS and share happy experiences about their time with us. Do NOT share rider/client photos without specific permission. You may share photos to the [Google Drive](#).

10. Code of conduct

OATS is committed to being a calm, joyful place to spend time and build community. As such, we discourage rumors and encourage volunteers to communicate concerns to the Barn Manager or Board of Directors. OATS wants every volunteer to leave with a smile on their face every time they visit the property. Please refrain from using offensive language, discussing politics, or spreading rumors. Any slurs or judgments of others' choices or lifestyles will result in being excused from the program. We empower our volunteers to come to the Barn Manager or Board of Directors with any concerns about anything they overhear. Please share concerns via email to ensure record keeping and the ability to respond thoughtfully.

11. Access to the property

Volunteers may enter the OATS property at their previously communicated time(s). If volunteers would like access at a different time, they must reach out to the volunteer coordinator, Barn manager, or Barn Assistants.

12. Horse protocol

Volunteers may handle horses when preparing for classes or when given specific permission to do so. There is absolutely no horse riding without permission or another person on the premises who knows you are riding. This is for the safety of our horses and volunteers.

13. Riding opportunities

Volunteers may have opportunities to ride horses through our HEAT exercise program or for leisure time. These opportunities are reserved for volunteers who consistently put in time with the facility and are subject to horse health and availability. If you desire riding time, you must communicate with the Barn manager and Lead Instructor. You may also be offered riding time by the above staff.

You may also choose to take lessons with our qualified instructors to learn to ride or improve your skills. The structure for hours volunteered and discount on lessons follows:

Hours volunteered weekly	Discount
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5	10% off lessons
10	20% off
15+	30% off

Volunteer hours must be for the previous session to get the discount for the following session. Ex: volunteering 5 hours/week for the winter session=10% off lessons during the spring session.

14. Animal interactions/treats

Do not offer food of any sort to any animal aside from the dietary instructions posted in the feed room. Several of our horses have allergies or medical conditions which require a special diet. All animals are to remain in their specified spaces unless there is permission from the volunteer coordinator, Barn manager, or Barn Assistants.

15. Grounds maintenance

Volunteers with special training AND permission to use the gators, tractors, lawnmowers, or weed whackers may use these pieces of equipment as needed to maintain OATS' grounds. Volunteers are expected to clean up after themselves and leave the property better than they found it. If volunteers use tools, they must return them to their designated spots. All trash, cans, and bottles should be placed in appropriate receptacles. Hay, shavings, and animal mess should be disposed of properly.

16. Personal safety/illness

Our number one goal is safety. As such, we ask that volunteers behave safely when around the animals. Unless specifically designated, no chasing, running, or rough play should occur in animal enclosures or the barn. In case of injury, an incident report will be filled out and signed by the Lead Instructor, instructor, Barn manager, or Barn Assistants.

Sometimes, unforeseen circumstances arise. Events like power outages, falls, or potentially physical individuals may occur. At OATS, our volunteers' and horses' safety are of utmost importance. If any of these events occur, listen to the instructor, stop your horse immediately, and wait for further instructions.

17. Infraction/dismissal

OATS retains the right to excuse anyone from the farm at any time for any reason. This will be reserved for dangerous situations that have not been rectified or other unacceptable behaviors. Volunteers will be spoken with before dismissal if there is an opportunity for recovery.

If you have questions or concerns, direct them to the Barn Assistants, Barn manager, or Board of Directors. Updated March 23, 2026. Approved by the OATS Board of Directors.