

## Giving Back: Ways to Volunteer in the Equestrian World

**Giving back to the horse world doesn't require loads of money or time. Find out how you can help the horses or an equine organization in your community.**

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Horse people are, by nature, very giving. Many of us willingly give time and money to causes we believe in, from supporting our local animal shelter to caring for the needy in our communities.

But how can you help the horses and horse organizations in your community? There are a plethora of ways to volunteer in the horse world, and not all of them require an ongoing weekly time commitment.

Many equine organizations run horse shows or trail rides as fundraisers, and these events require plenty of help from volunteers.

### Finding a Cause

The hardest part of giving back might be narrowing down your choices of where you want to volunteer. Is there an organization in your community that is near to your heart? The options may seem endless: veterans' riding programs; land conservation groups; local 4-H or FFA chapters; equine welfare, equine rescue or adoption agencies with chapters near you; therapeutic riding centers; even a local boarding barn that does an excellent job teaching kids can be a great place to provide assistance.

If you're still stumped about where to spend your time, word of mouth in the equine industry is a powerful thing—simply asking your horsey friends about good local organizations will lead to lots of results. Additionally, check tack shops for bulletin boards that list upcoming events. Many equine charities have fundraisers that will be heavily publicized prior to the event.

Be sure to search Facebook and Twitter—many organizations post their most current news and information on social media rather than on a traditional website. It doesn't hurt to ask for help from your personal social network, either!

One thing to remember: Some of these organizations will not be able to let you volunteer hands-on with their horses for liability reasons. The same goes for volunteering with some of their patrons. In some cases, those programs that offer hippotherapy to veterans or disabled persons will require you to go through a formal and rigorous training to ensure the safety of all parties involved. This is not to discourage you as a volunteer, but to ensure that all participants are safe.

### Locating a Volunteer Opportunity

Once you've found an organization with which you would like to volunteer, contact them to see if and how you can help. Don't be offended if they say they are OK for now. They may have more opportunities leading during their busy season or leading up to a major fundraising event.

Some events these groups might host include horse shows, tack sales, sponsored trail rides, open houses and more. Think about your talents and interests and how they could be useful in organizing and running the event. Each of these includes lots of work beforehand, so if you have time prior to the day of the event, let the organizers know. There are many details to be covered, from setting up tables, arranging items, early registration, and more.

If you have special skills with computers, marketing, design or event planning, be sure to let the leaders know so they can make the most of your knowledge. If you're social media savvy, offer to help them get the word out about the event.

If you have a very specific skill set, such as veterinary or nursing care, you may be able to help equine organizations in ways other people cannot, specifically if you would like to volunteer at an equine rescue or clinic. One unique opportunity, if you happen to live near Penn Vet's New Bolton Center in southeastern Pennsylvania, is the opportunity to be a "foal sitter" with the equine hospital.

Enlisting more than 90 foal sitters a year, there are three shifts: 7 a.m. to 3 p.m.; 3 p.m. to 11 p.m.; and 11 p.m. to 7 a.m. Possible duties for foal sitters include holding the foals upright, assisting staff as they stand and turn foals, milking mares,

monitoring equipment, changing bedding, and more. For more information on this unique volunteer opportunity, go to: [www.vet.upenn.edu](http://www.vet.upenn.edu). And If You Have More Time...

If you have more than just the occasional free hour or two, and you have a cause about which you are deeply passionate, you may be interested in sitting on a board of directors for a program that focuses on your issues, whether that is a specific horse breed or equestrian discipline, or a specific issue (land conservation, land use, drugs and medications, etc.) These typically association-driven organizations are always looking for passionate, driven people to help steer the industry.

Sarah Coleman has a soft spot for chestnuts with chrome, including her off-the-track Thoroughbred that she competes in the hunters. Based in Lexington, Ky., she is the Director of Education and Development for New Vocations Racehorse Adoption Program.