

Client Handbook 2025



**Main Stay's mission is to enrich mind, body and spirit
through powerful connections with horses, animals
and nature.**

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Main Stay Therapeutic Farm Program Values

Integrity: Our motivation to be part of Main Stay comes from a common mission, and so we act with honesty and sincerity in all our interactions within Main Stay. With our focus always on our clients, we carefully protect individual and client confidentiality. We maintain a belief that the program is bigger than any one of us, and we avoid conflicts of interest and any behavior that would come from selfish or ulterior motives.

Quality: Our commitment to Main Stay is expressed in our standard of excellence in all we do. We strive to provide the best of everything – teachers, facilities, horses, equipment, volunteers, and staff. Knowing we are never too good to try harder – learn more - open new doors – search for new answers, we are constantly seeking ways to improve ourselves and our program. We accept that patience is an important part of the process of individual progress.

Respect: We show consideration and honor for persons, animals, and property, and do everything in our power to preserve the honor and integrity of the person, animal, and property. All individuals who are affiliated with Main Stay will respect life, creatures, and the earth. None of us is above another. We are all equals. We are all students. We are all teachers. We hold admiration and open-mindedness to the possibilities that someone or something can bring into our lives – an acknowledgement that everything serves a purpose and is precious.

Team Work: We are all working toward a common goal, and in that work we are responsible and accountable toward one another and toward Main Stay. Our work ethic is that no job is too small – no person too big. We are hardworking, dedicated individuals who work together and are willing to go above and beyond when required. We recognize that everyone has a gift to give; we rely on each other and can be relied upon at all times. We have the ability to, when required, compromise with others to achieve the common good.

Caring: Caring means Compassion, Accountability, Respect, Integrity, Nurturing, and Giving. When we care, we have a true concern for the health and well-being of others and of all life; we see the world through eyes other than our own. Our sensitivity to the needs of others results in active caring, in going outside ourselves and wearing “someone else’s skin.” The concern and love we have for people and all life envelopes Main Stay and creates an environment that rejuvenates the souls of all who come here.

Accepting: We have the ability to accept others’ ideas, solutions, creativity, and differences with an open mind and heart; we suspend judgment, bias, and pre-conceived expectations in our dealings with our clients and with others. We look for the ability in people, not the disability. We celebrate differences and search for common ground.

Safety: The prevention of accidents and ensuring the security of persons, animals, and property is a priority for all who are associated with Main Stay. Everything is questioned; every detail is attended to; every person places safety first in all activities. Main Stay provides a non-threatening environment where trust is of paramount importance. Rules and guidelines for safety are followed at all times, checks and balances are in place, and safety education is continuously provided and expected of all staff and volunteers.

We expect all members of Main Stay to uphold these values - Thank You!

Introduction

Welcome to Main Stay. We're glad you're here! The Client Handbook contains important information regarding the program's policies and procedures. Please review it and call the office for further information or clarification if needed.

Main Stay was founded in 1987 and is a 501(c)3 organization. Our program is a premier accredited center of the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship, International (PATH Intl). Main Stay offers adaptive riding, equine and animal assisted learning programs and adaptive gardening to a wide range of clients. *Harness the Power of Your Team*, Main Stay's professional and personal development program, is available to outside organizations. Contact the office for information on this program.

Please be aware that using animals in therapeutic sessions involves potentially dangerous situations. Although all measures are taken to reduce those risks, there is always a chance of injury and/or death. We ask you to weigh those risks carefully before participating in sessions.

Main Stay is committed to preserving the right of confidentiality for all individuals. The staff and volunteers shall keep confidential all client medical, social, referral, personal and financial information.

Adaptive Riding

Three sessions are offered for adaptive riding beginning in mid-January and ending mid-December. Riders are able to choose which of the three sessions they would like to ride. Main Stay takes scheduled breaks throughout the riding season some of which coincide with major holidays as classes are cancelled on those days. A complete calendar is located on the website.

Equine and Animal Assisted Learning Programs

Therapeutic activities for individuals and groups are available year round with scheduled breaks coinciding with the riding season. Sessions typically are designed with social, emotional and behavioral goals in mind. Duration of sessions may be a short, week long camp, multi-week sessions, or throughout the school year. This primarily non-riding program works with a wide variety of clients from early childhood through seniors. Single visits to the farm are available for groups interested in an outing to an adaptive farm or groups unable to attend multiple sessions.

Adaptive Gardening

When appropriate, gardening activities may be included as part of the Equine and Animal Assisted Learning Programs.

Communication

- E-mail is our primary means of communication. Please make sure the office has your current e-mail information. Regular mail is used for clients who do not have access to e-mail.
- Bulletin boards by the arena list notices and information about upcoming events.
- A calendar by the arena is available for riders to list upcoming absences.
- Main Stay has a Facebook page that is frequently updated and a website with information about the program, a current-year program calendar and forms required to participate in the program.
- **For cancellations, please call or text the rider cell phone at: 815-355-8920**

Lesson/Session Information

Client Forms

- Clients must complete the required forms and return to the office by the deadline established. Forms must be updated annually for all clients regardless of their start date. Sessions can't begin until all required paperwork is received.
 - Client Registration and Release & Health History Form
 - Client Photo Release Form
 - Client's Medical History & Physician's Statement
 - *this form must be filled out and completed by a physician. Main Stay does not have a fax line, so this form must be returned to the office by the client.
 - Consent For Release of Information
 - Client Confirmation Financial, Rider Assistance, and Weather Policies
- All spouses/caregivers/parents who accompany an adaptive riding client to his/her lesson must complete a Registration and Release form and a Photo Release form as well which will be kept on hand in the event of an emergency.

Adaptive riding private lessons are 30 minutes in length and semi-private lessons are 45 minutes in length.

Animal Assisted sessions vary in length depending on the needs of the group or individual.

Main Stay reserves the right to end a class earlier for the following reasons:

- Weather conditions

- Client issues including fatigue or behavioral problems
- Horse/animal issues

Attendance and Cancellation Policies

Adaptive Riding

- Please try to provide at least a 24 hour notice when cancelling a session by calling the office and putting the dates on the rider cancellation calendar in the Gathering Room.
 - For last minute cancellations, please call or text the rider cell phone at: 815-355-8920. The instructor will have this phone after 5pm.
- **No refunds are provided when clients cancel for any reason including illness or vacation.**
- **Paperwork is due in December or January, based on the session(s) you chose to ride. Once you have received your time/day on the schedule, you are responsible for those lessons even if you have not returned all the completed paperwork (i.e. if you are missing your doctor's form and classes have begun, you will be financially responsible for the missed classes until the form is returned).**
- Your account will be credited if Main Stay cancels classes.
- No make-up riding lessons are possible as our program runs 6 days a week.
- Clients who may be out for an extended period of time due to illness or surgery may be placed on medical leave. By doing so, the client will not be charged for those absences related to the medical leave. A medical release form must be completed prior to returning to sessions. PATH Intl. Precautions and Contraindications may prevent a rider from returning even if the physician has released a rider. Please contact the office to schedule a medical leave.
- Riders are not allowed to ride while wearing a hard cast on any extremity.
- Riders may lose their riding slot due to excessive absenteeism or missing more than three sessions without prior notification.

Equine and Animal Assisted Sessions

- Session fees are non-refundable, however, alternative programming dates that are mutually beneficial can be arranged.

Financial Information

It takes approximately \$950,000 annually to operate the program. Over 85% of the operating expenses are funded by contributions from fundraising events, private donations and grants.

Main Stay receives less than 20% of its operating income from lesson/session fees. All clients at Main Stay are considered to be participating on partial rider assistance. Main Stay does not receive any state or federal funding.

In order to help offset costs, we ask each adaptive riding client to be a part of our fundraising team by raising or contributing \$200 per year.

Ways to get involved include:

- **Participate in a Main Stay fundraiser – there are several throughout the year including our annual gala.**
- **Donate to the Annual Appeal request**
- **Participate in an event that benefits Main Stay such as the Human Race, Santa Run or Fall Diddley. Fall Diddley is a craft fair organized and run by the Mental Health Resource League of McHenry County-a major funder of Main Stay.**
- **Volunteer your time at the farm**

Fees

New Rider one-time evaluation fee - \$60

Adaptive riding and horsemanship annual registration fee - \$25

Adaptive riding and horsemanship lesson fee - \$60 per lesson

Equine and animal assisted sessions – Please contact us for individual and group rates.

Billing

Adaptive Riding

Lesson/Session fees are billed 30 days in advance. Payment is due by the 30th of each month prior to the lesson/session billed. If for any reason you are not able to pay your invoice in full within 30 days, you must contact the office to set up a payment plan. If payment is not received by the 30th of the month and no communication has occurred with the office, the lesson/session is put on hold. If payment is not received within 45 days and there is still no contact with the office, clients may lose their lesson/session spot.

We also offer auto-pay. You can leave a credit card on file with us (which is encrypted in our computer) and will be used to make your monthly payment. Contact the office for billing questions.

Equine and Animal Assisted Sessions

Agencies/individuals will receive an invoice, confirmation and group information sheet detailing session dates, costs and details regarding the sessions. Payment is required prior to the start of the session.

Rider Financial Assistance Information

A limited amount of financial assistance is available for adaptive riding clients who meet the established criteria and are unable to afford the current fee. Funding is awarded at the beginning of the season on a first-come first-serve basis. Please contact the office for more information or to request an application.

Barn Rules

- Anyone not directly involved in the lesson is asked to stay behind the gate leading to the ramp for adaptive riding lessons or outside the group for Equine and Animal Assisted sessions. The adaptive riding instructor will assist riders up the ramp unless additional assistance is needed from a caregiver.
- Individuals who view the lesson/session are asked to remain quiet during the lesson to allow the client to remain focused. The Gathering Room or Paddock Room 3 can be used as a viewing and waiting room and has toys and books available to siblings.
- The barn aisle and pastures are off limits unless accompanied by a Main Stay staff member or designated volunteer.

Weather Guidelines

Classes/sessions may be cancelled due to inclement weather including:

- Severe thunderstorms/tornado warnings for McHenry County
- Poor driving conditions
- Extreme cold or heat may occasionally require classes/sessions to be cancelled, however, because the arena is heated and well insulated, they will typically run.

It is the responsibility of the client to call the farm to learn of any weather cancellations. A notice will be posted on the Main Stay Facebook page with current cancellation information when weather poses a threat.

Adaptive riding classes may be held in hot weather with the lesson content focused on un-mounted activities. There is much more to being with horses than riding and the un-mounted work allows for new and different skills to be learned and keep cooler.

Emergency Procedures

Emergency procedures are reviewed during class at the beginning of each adaptive riding session or when a new rider begins. The procedures include:

Severe weather

Classes are cancelled in the case of a severe weather warning only. Weather watches are to be monitored closely. Ideally, in severe weather, everyone on the premises will gather in the South Building if possible. Be alert for the tornado siren.

- All instructors have a weather app on their cell phone in order to be alert to the weather and ask parents/caregivers and volunteers to be on alert as well.
- If the weather changes and becomes severe, (extreme wind, rain or lightning) take immediate action.
- The safe spot designated by the fire department for tornadoes and severe weather are:
 - **South Barn**
 - the basement if everyone in the barn is able to navigate stairs. If not, everyone should go to the women's restroom.
 - **North Barn**
 - The center of the barn aisle by the emergency weather sign

Fire

- **Procedure for South Barn**
 - Riders will be dismounted in the arena with the procedure used for severe weather depending on the location of the fire.
 - Riders, parents/caregivers, sidewalkers and anyone else in the barn area will go to the designated safety area. For the South barn, the safety area is the parking lot where the front parking lot meets the side parking lot (the southeast corner of the building). There is a "safety yellow" sign marking the meeting location.
 - A head count will be taken to make sure everyone is accounted for. Everyone will remain in the safety area until told to leave by an instructor or head staff member.
- **Procedure for North Barn**
 - Participants will be taken through the nearest outside door leading to the garden or the adjacent paddock to the west. Staff will provide animals

access to the adjacent paddock through the west or north arena barn doors.

- A head count will be taken to make sure everyone is accounted for. Everyone will remain together until told to leave by an instructor or head staff member.
- While participants are leaving the barn, the animal specialist or volunteer should be sent to alert personnel in the South Barn.

Client Qualifications

Eligibility

Safety is our first priority at Main Stay. There are many factors that are involved in determining eligible clients including, but not limited to, the safety and appropriateness of the client, animal and volunteers. A client's eligibility may be reviewed as needed depending on any of these factors. It is the right of Main Stay to decline eligibility to a client if we do not have the staff, volunteer or horse/animal needed to safely conduct a class/session. Main Stay reserves the right to refuse lessons/sessions to anyone having a disability that could make riding a life-threatening situation.

The following guidelines detail reasons a client may be removed from the program:

- For adaptive riding, weight or height changes that make riding inappropriate or unsafe
 - Main Stay uses the guideline that a horse can typically carry 20% of its weight with a balanced rider. If the rider is unbalanced, the weight ratio may be reduced to 10% of the horse's body weight. Using these ratios means that a 1,000 lb. horse could carry anywhere from a 100 – 200 pound rider, including tack, depending on the rider's ability to stay centered on the horse.
 - Height - If a rider's height or torso height becomes out of proportion to the size horse required to safely accommodate a rider, a review will be in order.
 - Behavioral issues that cannot be safely managed.
 - The staff member, along with input from the team, has the final decision on safety. If a client's behavior is affecting the safety of the lesson/session, animal, staff or volunteer, the client's eligibility will be reviewed.
- Medical Changes
 - Main Stay follows the Precautions and Contraindications established through PATH Intl. Riding or sessions will be discontinued if a client's medical status changes and it becomes a contraindication for riding or participation in Equine Assisted Learning sessions.

- Failure to uphold the Main Stay values
- Perpetual absenteeism or tardiness to class/sessions

Proper Attire

Helmets

All riders are required to wear an ASTM-SEI approved for equestrian use riding helmet while riding. Main Stay will provide a helmet to those riders who need one, however, it is recommended that riders purchase their own helmets to ensure the best fit and eliminate health concerns.

Clothing

The following items ensure a safe and comfortable riding lesson:

- Long, non-slippery pants (even in hot weather). Shorts are not allowed for participation in adaptive riding.
- Although it is our policy that all saddles/surcingles are equipped with quick release safety stirrups, sturdy, hard-soled shoes with a heel and long socks are recommended
- Gloves in cold weather
- Long hair pulled back in a low ponytail

At times, Main Stay receives clothing donations that are available to riders. Many local riding clubs hold used tack and clothing sales as well. Feel free to ask your instructor if you would like more information about riding clothes.

Volunteers

Main Stay could not operate without the help of our wonderful volunteers. It takes over 100 volunteers **per week** to assist with sessions. Please thank them for their time and dedication – without them there would be no Main Stay!

Parents, spouses, caregivers and siblings 13 years of age or older are encouraged to attend a new volunteer training session in the event of a shortage of volunteers. A class will not be run without the necessary staffing. By going through volunteer training, you can assist in case of a shortage.

Other volunteer jobs can be done during the client's class time such as sweeping the barn aisles, watering the flowers or basic cleaning. Please contact the office if you would like to help while at the farm.

You are encouraged to share your thoughts on the program and get involved. Any extra time and energy you can give is greatly appreciated! Please contact the office with any questions you may have regarding the program or information contained within the handbook.

We hope you enjoy being a part of the Main Stay team!