main stay
FARM

2026 Volunteer Handbook

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

Welcome!

We are so excited to introduce you to the Main Stay team! We believe the more you know the better team member you can be. Please take a few minutes to read and become familiar with the following material. Our goal is to keep everyone safe – our clients, volunteers, and staff.

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 and horsemanship, 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 any of our programs.

6919 Keystone Road
Richmond, IL 60071

Office: (815) 653-9374
Fax: (815) 728-1224

www.mainstayfarm.org

Volunteer Coordinator Contact
Cell: (815) 382-9374
VC@mainstayfarm.org

Main Stay's Facebook and Instagram pages are updated regularly. Please follow us if you use either of these social media platforms.

https://www.facebook.com/MainStayTFarm

https://www.instagram.com/mainstayfarm/

Sharing our stories with the community is essential to the success of Main Stay's programs, and you can help!

What makes a great team member?

Upholding all the Main Stay Values.

Willingness to learn the Main Stay way.

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, animals, 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- and 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 on 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 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 judgement, 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.

Speaking In Person-First Language: *What & Why*

Person First Language shows respect to people living with disabilities. Person First Language is important because it honors the fact that a person is not defined by the label of their diagnosis. We ask that you please practice using Person First Language when discussing persons with disabilities both at Main Stay and in your everyday life. It is important that all people are regarded with equal respect, regardless of ability or diagnosis.

- Say “people with disabilities” rather than “the disabled.”
- Say “person with a disability” rather than “disabled person.”
- Individuals do have their own preferences. If you are not sure what words to use, ask.

The following are considered outdated terms: handicapped, crippled, retarded. Be aware that many people with disabilities dislike terms like “physically challenged” and “differently abled.” Say “person who uses a wheelchair” rather than “confined to a wheelchair” or “wheelchair bound.” The wheelchair is what enables the person to get around and participate in society; it’s typically liberating, not confining.

The word “challenged” is particularly common but is not favored by individuals with disabilities. Think of it in terms of we all have our own challenges, but wouldn’t like the world to label us by them. With any disability, avoid negative, disempowering words, like “victim” or “sufferer.” Say “person with AIDS” instead of “AIDS victim” or “person who suffers from AIDS.”

Communication

Please talk to staff if there is something you need to talk about. We are here and ready to listen and support.

We ask that you communicate regularly with us about your volunteering availability, your experiences at the farm, ask questions, and provide feedback. If you sense an emergency arising, please stop and ask immediately!

Please make sure we have your correct email address and cell phone number. Volunteer scheduling is primarily done by text messaging. We send occasional “Volunteer News” emails with important updates and information about what is happening at the farm.

For any scheduling concerns, especially cancellations, please call or text the volunteer coordinator cell phone (815) 382-9374. A volunteer coordinator will have the phone weekdays from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm. Instructors will have it during evening and weekend classes.

Volunteer Registration and Background Checks

All volunteers must complete a Volunteer Registration and Release Form each year. Forms are electronic and are available online. You will receive an email with instructions. If you need paper forms, please let us know.

Volunteers who are age 18 and older must complete a background check. Initial background checks are at the expense of the volunteer. Main Stay is committed to providing a safe environment for all who come to the farm, particularly those we serve. Therefore, volunteers who are age 18 and older are required to complete a criminal background check. Criminal records do not automatically disqualify candidates from volunteering. We will review the substance of the records and make an informed decision after discussion with the individual and taking into consideration the role they will be performing at the farm. Main Stay will pay for renewing background checks for active volunteers, every 3 years.

Volunteer Commitment

Adaptive riding lessons are scheduled in sessions that run over a period of months. We have three sessions each year: 1) Winter Session; 2) Spring/Summer Session and 3) Fall Session. During a session, weekday lessons may run from late morning through 7:30 pm and Saturday lessons run early morning through early afternoon.

The schedule for each session is based on our client's needs and the availability of horses and instructors. Volunteers are typically assigned a weekly time slot within a session.

As you make the decision to volunteer with Main Stay, we ask that you choose your level of involvement and then make a commitment to that choice. Our programming relies on volunteers to run successfully, and we thank you for your commitment. The number of hours you choose to give is truly up to you, and once you have made that decision, please plan to be here every week during a programming session. We understand that unforeseen situations may arise that affect availability and we will do our best to accommodate and find substitutes when needed. Your gift of time helps to ensure a safe and beneficial experience for our clients and horses.

Please:

- Arrive on time
- Be present with the clients and/or horses
- Notify the volunteer coordinator and/or instructor if you will be absent or late
- Be aware that excessive cancellations may result in dismissal from a volunteer position

Please record your volunteer hours each time you are at Main Stay. Having an accurate record of annual volunteer hours is very important to the program when seeking funding and to share with our stakeholders.

Cancellations

We will make every effort to contact you in a timely manner if a class you are scheduled to volunteer for is cancelled. If a client cancels, we will notify you as soon as we have received notice.

Please remember to notify the volunteer coordinator with as much advance notice as possible if you are unable to attend at your scheduled time. The volunteer coordinator cell phone is (815) 382-9374. Classes cannot run if there are an insufficient number of volunteers. Early notice allows us time to find a substitute.

Main Stay will cancel lessons for the following weather reasons:

-Severe Weather **Warnings** for McHenry County

-Unsafe road conditions. **Please call if you are unsure of the weather conditions.**

Volunteer Roles and Trainings

All volunteers require training specific to the role(s) in which they wish to serve prior to volunteering. Trainings will cover the volunteer role and expectations and provide hands-on experience.

Adaptive Riding Program

- Groomers – groom horses prior to classes
- Sidewalkers – walk next to riders during classes to help ensure their safety
- Horse Handlers – lead horses during classes
- Aisle Coordinator – help the instructor pull tack, keep lessons moving smoothly and on schedule, and assist in the grooming area or arena as needed

Animal Assisted Learning (AAL) Program

Volunteers assist the facilitator during individual and group sessions, and may work with large horses, the little herd and/or the rabbits. *AAL volunteers need to be a minimum of 18 and possibly 21, depending on the group.*

Other Volunteer Opportunities

Volunteers occasionally help with tack cleaning, facility maintenance, animal care and administrative matters. These roles are established on a case-by-case basis depending on our needs. If you have special skills to share, please be sure to tell the volunteer coordinator.

Physical & Mental Health

It is important for volunteers to be in healthy physical and mental condition. Being a volunteer can be physically challenging. All volunteers must be able to follow directions. Some volunteer roles may require that you work independently and/or be responsible for the safety of our clients.

Main Stay Therapeutic Farm does not provide worker's compensation for any volunteer.

Please consider and inform Main Stay if you have the following health concerns, so that we may help you find the right place on the team:

- Allergies
- Asthma
- Heart, bone or joint concerns
- Diabetes
- Hearing or vision loss
- Any physical or mental condition that could impact your ability to safely perform a volunteer role.

If you are volunteering as a sidewalker in adaptive riding classes, you should be able to support the rider with the proper supportive holds and be able to perform an emergency dismount if necessary. At times, this involves supporting the weight of the rider. Sidewalkers must be alert and aware of what is happening in the lesson and able to quickly respond to maintain safety.

If you are volunteering as a horse leader or sidewalker in adaptive riding classes, you will be expected to walk on uneven terrain for up to 60 minutes with short periods of jogging. Leaders must be alert and aware of horse behavior and able to quickly respond to maintain safety.

If you are volunteering as a groomer, you will need to be able to stand, bend and reach all body parts of the horse, and balance on a mounting block when working with tall horses. The groomer role requires bending over to pick up a hoof and supporting the hoof while cleaning it. This is a weight bearing activity, and the weight may vary depending on the size of the horse. Groomers must be alert and aware of horse behavior and able to quickly respond to maintain safety.

Dress Code

Please wear clothing that will be comfortable to work in; keeping in mind we often have visitors and school groups, and we frequently take photographs and videos. We will do our best to inform you of press visits ahead of time.

- We suggest long pants, even in hot weather since the bugs can be bad depending on the season. *If you choose to wear shorts, they need to be knee length*.
- We recommend a short-sleeved or long-sleeved T-shirt depending on weather. Please do not wear tops with thin straps, that are low cut, or with offensive logos.
- Please wear boots, hard-soled leather shoes, or gym shoes.
- (Clogs, open-toed shoes, and fuzzy/soft boots are not safe options).
- Wear and bring layers.
- Pull long hair back.
- No dangling jewelry.
- No strong perfume/cologne/cigarette odor.

Confidentiality Policy

It is understood that from time to time, staff and/or volunteers of Main Stay (including members of the Board of Directors and Advisory Council) may have access to confidential and proprietary information. This information may include, but is not limited to, personnel information, participant information, donor information, contractual agreements, intellectual property, and marketing/sales strategies. It is understood that staff and/or volunteers will not disclose this information to third parties, unless approved by the Executive Director. Disclosure of Main Stay confidential information without express written approval is prohibited. Failure to adhere to this policy may lead to dismissal of duties.

*As a volunteer, you will not always know the diagnosis of the rider with whom you work. We do not openly share this, as we choose to respect privacy and to focus on abilities. You will be told information important to safely working with a rider. Riders and/or families may share information with volunteers at their discretion. We ask you to respect the confidentiality of that rider. Please notify an instructor if any shared information you receive is important to the day's lesson.

Seizure Disorder

We will always share with you if a rider you are working with has a seizure disorder. Seizures can be unpredictable and vary in how they appear each time one happens. Any rider with active and significant seizures must wear a gait belt and have sidewalkers. If a rider has a seizure while mounted, all activities will stop. The rider will be supported, and remain mounted (as long as tolerated by the equine). At the conclusion of a grand-mal seizure, the instructor will dismount the rider, as he/she will most likely go home. Mild seizures, such as “zoning out” without other symptoms, may allow the rider to continue riding.

Seizures range from mild to severe. Indications may include:

•Sudden changes in alertness or behavior

•Uncontrolled staring or “zoning out” behaviors

•Repetitive, involuntary jerking movements

•Loss of consciousness

•Changes in breathing patterns

Understand the risks

Your tetanus shot should be up to date even though the risk is rare and our animals receive routine vaccinations. Horses are the number one carrier of tetanus.

Our horses are well trained; however, they are powerful and reactive animals so accidents are possible. Please follow all rules and guidance from instructors. Maintain a “safety first” mentality.

If the need for first aid arises, please notify a staff member. First aid kits are located in the office and the barn, and are marked with a Red Cross sign. Instructors will refresh clients and volunteers on Main Stay’s Safety and Emergency Procedures at the beginning of each session.

Code of Conduct

Our staff and volunteers feel our work here at Main Stay is a privilege. The rewards are great and the regrets few. We trust all members of our team to represent our program in a professional and caring manner by upholding the program values.

Main Stay reserves the right to refuse volunteer opportunities to any individuals who do not adhere to the policies and procedures in this handbook. On very rare occasions, we may need to dismiss a volunteer. The following may be cause for dismissal:

- Lack of respect for a client, animal, another volunteer, or staff
- Jeopardizing a client's physical or mental well being
- Violating a team member's confidentiality
- Appearing under the influence of alcohol or drugs
- More than three (3) absences without properly notifying the volunteer coordinator
- Physical, cognitive, or emotional concerns that pose safety risks for any member of the team

We have a **no smoking** policy. Smoking is prohibited everywhere on the property. The only exception is that you may smoke in your personal vehicle.

Thank you so much! We hope you feel that there is a role you will enjoy and look forward to having you on our team!