

# HAVEN ACRES

## Participant Handbook



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## Haven Acres Staff:

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## About Haven Acres

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The founders, Jason and Jenifer Heath, took in a teenage boy in 2002 that struggled with learning disabilities and mental health issues due to the abuse and neglect he had suffered as a child. The Heaths heard about a youth ranch in Oregon that used horses to help bring healing to kids with these types of issues. However, when they searched for one nearby that could possibly assist the hurting teen they were raising, they were unable to find one in the area.

The idea of someday running a similar ranch was conceived all those years ago and finally came to fruition in 2013. The program was developed by following the model of Crystal Peaks Youth Ranch in Oregon.

Haven Acres is a faith-based youth mentorship ranch that pairs rescued or adopted horses with at-risk youth in the Twin Cities Metro Area. The design pairs one child, ages 9-17, with a mentor and a horse that work together, free of charge, each week for a 90-minute session during the summer.

The kids help with chores around the farm and learn basic horsemanship, all the while building trust, confidence, and a good work ethic.

Since most of the horses have been neglected or cast off for some reason, a mutually beneficial relationship develops between the horse and the child. Guided by a supportive mentor, opportunities arise for both the horses and kids to experience God's transformational love which ultimately leads them through the process of healing and restoration.

We are so thankful for the many hands that have come together to allow us to provide this opportunity!



## Our Mission and Vision

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### Mission

Haven Acres exists to rescue animals, serve youth and their families through mentorship, and demonstrate God's love.

### Vision

Haven Acres offers a safe, country environment where hurting youth find hope, healing, and restoration through their interaction with horses and loving mentors that exhibit the transformational love of Jesus.

## Summer Mentorship

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We are a mentoring program that not only engages youth in positive behavior, but also focuses on the specific life story and needs of each participant, encouraging them to overcome negative circumstances and grow in areas such as self-control, diligence, compassion, team work, and patience. Every participant we serve will be paired with a mentor and a horse who they will get to build relationships with during the summer. We have additional staff overseeing and assisting the mentors and will increase staffing for a participant when determined necessary.

Though our program generally involves horsemanship skills, other activities may be incorporated into sessions such as: caring for the goats or chickens, gardening, building projects, and other various tasks that may arise on the farm. We've been known to have horse painting contests, do "horsey" crafts, and play a variety of games with the horses. We try to make sessions fun while instilling a good work ethic in the kids as they assist with chores and other tasks around the ranch.

## Participant Eligibility

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### Age

Our participants are between the ages of 9 and 17.

### Weight

The maximum weight that can be accommodated is 250 pounds if the student intends to ride a horse. Riders over 200 pounds must be well-balanced, as determined by program staff. This is for the protection of our horses and the safety of our volunteers and participants. Efforts will be made to adapt sessions to accommodate individuals. For instance, even if a participant is unable to ride, we may teach them more extensively how to work with a horse on the ground, or other activities that do not use horses can be explored between the participant and the mentor.

## Confidentiality Policy

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In the course of equine assisted activities and sessions, staff will provide volunteers such as mentors, mavericks and overseers with confidential information about the participant only on a need-to-know basis. Volunteer training includes a specific discussion of confidentiality and the importance of not divulging diagnosis, progress reports, and other private information to any outside party. Volunteers are required to sign a confidentiality agreement.

Haven Acres will not release any information regarding a participant to outside sources (such as schools, caseworkers, therapists, etc.) without written permission from the participant or participant's legal guardian.

## Information Update

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All participants must complete a new full set of paperwork. Also, if a person transitions from sessions to a volunteer role or vice versa, additional paperwork may be required.



## What to Wear

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### Helmets

All participants must wear **approved** headgear when working with or around the horses.

Helmets are available at the barn or riders may bring their own.

### Footwear

Hard soled shoes or boots with a heel are ideal for riding, but other close-toed shoes are acceptable.

There are a few riding boots available in the barn for students to use, but we cannot guarantee that we have your student's size. Sandals, crocs, and open-toed shoes are not permitted.

### Clothing

Riders should dress appropriately for existing weather conditions so they can be comfortable during lessons. In the summer, sunscreen, bug spray, and a water bottle are appropriate. We encourage young ladies to dress modestly. Crew neck t-shirts are preferable since we do a lot of bending when working with the horses. Also, please no tank tops or thin leggings. Long pants are recommended for anyone who will be riding, however, we do encourage you to use your best judgment when the weather is hot. Jewelry should not be worn as it can be hazardous.

## Observing a Session

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Family members and caregivers are encouraged to watch sessions and cheer along with mentors and volunteer staff as we encourage and support participants; however, for safety reasons, parents and other children must not be down in the area where sessions are taking place unless special permission is granted. Seating is available on the front or back porch of the house. If the presence of observers is distracting to the participants, Haven Acres staff may request that observers relocate to another area of the ranch.

For confidentiality, observers must not be very close while participants are working with their mentor and horse.

All children not participating in sessions must be under the supervision of a parent/adult at all times. A signed release form is required for every child on the property. Your children may use the trampoline, **one at a time**, and play on the play equipment **at your own risk** and only under strict adult supervision as we cannot monitor that area while sessions are ongoing.

## Pictures

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Please only take pictures of your child. Occasionally we have a child in the program who cannot have pictures taken of them. Please do not post any pictures with any children besides your own in it.

## Issues of Disabilities

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While some participants with a disability may need additional support to engage in certain activities, others may not. We expect ranch visitors and participants to encourage and support each other at all times. Bullying, coarse joking and other unkind behavior is not welcome and won't be tolerated at the ranch. This is a safe place!

## Dismissal of Guests and or Participants

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Since the safety of our participants, volunteers, horses, and staff is of paramount importance, there may be occasions when a guest or participant must be dismissed and/or told to leave the premises. One may be told to leave the premises immediately if, for example, he/she:

- Threatens the safety of others, is disruptive or abusive in any way to another person or animal on our property
- Is not in compliance with Haven Acres' policies or safety procedures
- Is in possession of a weapon
- Is under the influence or in possession of alcohol or drug
- Sexually harasses another participant, volunteer, or observer

## Smoking

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It should be noted that smoking of any kind is not allowed on Haven Acres property.

## Dogs

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We ask you to please leave your dogs at home. The only dogs allowed on the ranch will be dogs that reside on the property.

Service animals are welcome. At times when they are not working, they should be appropriately supervised by someone on the ground.



## Weather

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Haven Acres desires to hold sessions at the scheduled times as much as possible but may cancel sessions for extreme heat, extreme cold, or local weather patterns that make it unsafe to hold sessions. Some weather conditions, such as wind or lightening, make it unsafe to work with horses. We try to do alternate activities if weather prevents us from doing regular sessions. For cancellations initiated by Haven Acres, participants will receive an email or phone call in advance.

## Rescheduling

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In the event that Haven Acres must cancel lessons due to weather or facility emergencies, the cancelled lesson will not be rescheduled.

## Session Schedules

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Haven Acres generally conducts summer sessions from June to August. In the weekly program, participants are scheduled for 90-minute sessions once per week. Sessions run for six weeks, a week off, and then five more weeks. Your child will remain on the schedule for the twelve weeks of programming unless otherwise agreed upon. Fall sessions are generally for six weeks and are by invitation only.

## Early Arrivals

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If you arrive early for your session, out of consideration for others who may be in a session, please wait by or in your vehicle until your designated session time. Many times there are sessions before your scheduled time, so some students will be leaving as you're arriving. Please do not allow your children to wander around the property or go down near the animals while waiting as it is a liability for the ranch. We appreciate our volunteers and allow them a break in between sessions to use the bathroom and get a snack, so we do not want them to feel rushed. Sessions will begin at the scheduled time.

## Late Arrivals

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Participants who arrive up to fifteen minutes late may still participate in their session, but the session will end at the regularly scheduled time. Participants who arrive more than fifteen minutes late may not be able to ride that day. Alternate activities are at the discretion of the mentor.

## Absences

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If you must miss a session due to an illness, injury, or other emergency, please notify us as soon as possible. This allows us to use the session for someone on our waiting list. If a participant misses two or more of their sessions without a minimum of a 72 hour notice, the participant's reservation in the program may be given to someone on the waiting list and the participant placed on the waiting

list instead. It is our desire to accommodate schedules as much as possible, but we also take seriously our staff and volunteers' commitment to being present at the scheduled times and expect the same of participants.

## Fees

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There are no fees, Haven Acres is committed to offering our ranch sessions and activities free of charge.

## Minnesota Statute

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Minnesota's statute states that "a nonprofit corporation, association, or organization, or a person or other entity donating services, livestock, facilities, or equipment for the use of a nonprofit corporation, association, or organization, is not liable for the death of or an injury to a participant resulting from the inherent risks of livestock activities." (Minn. Stat. Â§ 604A.12)

## Release of Liability

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**Parents and guardians are required to read and sign the liability page attached to the Participants application form. The following is an excerpt from that document.**

**INHERENT RISKS / ASSUMPTION OF RISKS** I/WE ACKNOWLEDGE THAT: Risks, conditions, and dangers are inherent in (meaning an integral part of horse/equine/animal activities/stable activities, regardless of all feasible safety measures which can be taken, and I agree to assume them. The inherent risk include, but are not limited to any of the following: The propensity of an animal to behave in ways that may result in injury, harm, death, or loss to persons on or around the animals; the unpredictability of an equine's reaction to sounds, sudden movement, unfamiliar objects, persons, or other animals; Hazards, including, but not limited to, surface or subsurface conditions; A collision, encounter and/or confrontation with another equine, another animal, a person, or an object; The potential of an equine activity participant to act in a negligent manner that may contribute to injury, harm, death, or loss to the participant or to other persons, including but not limited to, failing to maintain control over and equine and/or failing to act within the ability of the participant. Horses are 5-15 times larger, 20-40 times more powerful, and 3-4 times faster than a human. If a participant falls from horse to ground it will generally be a distance of from 3.5 to 5.5 feet and the impact may result in harm to the participant. Horseback riding and equine training are activities in which one much smaller, weaker predator (the human) tries to impose its will on, and become one unit of movement with, another much larger, stronger prey animal that has a mind of its own (the horse) and each has a limited understanding of the other. If a horse is frightened or provoked it may divert from its training and act according to its natural survival instincts which may include, but are not limited to: Stopping short; Spinning around; Changing directions and/or speed at will; Shifting its weight; Bucking; Rearing; Kicking; Biting and/or Running from danger.

**I also acknowledge that these are just some of the risk and I agree to assume others not mentioned above. I am not relying on Haven Acres to list all possible risks for me.**