



Special Methods In Learning Equine Skills



CLIENT HANDBOOK

SMILES transcends traditional therapeutic methods by offering individuals with special needs, of all ages, the joy of participating in an equine assisted program which provides social, emotional, physical, and personal rewards.

N2666 County Road K
Darien, WI 53114

262-882-3470
classes@visitsmiles.org

www.visitsmiles.org

www.facebook.com/SMILESTherapeuticRiding

WELCOME TO SMILES!

Thank you so much for your interest in SMILES' Therapeutic/Adaptive Horsemanship Program. SMILES has been providing therapeutic programs to individuals with physical, cognitive, sensory, and learning disabilities in the southeast Wisconsin area since 1985.

SMILES is proud to be a Premier Accredited Center through PATH Intl. (Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International.) PATH Intl. is dedicated to supporting therapeutic horsemanship in a safe, educational, and enjoyable manner for individuals with disabilities. SMILES is honored to hold the Premier level of accreditation, which indicates our adherence to the absolute highest standards of safety and professionalism. All of the Instructors at SMILES hold the title of "Certified Therapeutic Riding Instructor" from PATH Intl.

Please read the information found in this packet carefully. For all questions, please contact our Program Coordinator, Katie Luessenhop:

☎ (262) 882-3470, option 2

✉ classes@visitsmiles.org

VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers are the lifeblood of SMILES! If you know someone who is a minimum of 15 years old and may be interested in volunteering, please direct them to our website for more information:

www.visitsmiles.org/volunteers

Thank you again for your interest in becoming part of the SMILES family!

Sincerely

Katie Luessenhop
Program Coordinator

SMILES CLIENT ELIGIBILITY GUIDELINES

SMILES programs are based on an individual's ability to participate safely and effectively and in compliance with industry standards. Enrollment is offered when the necessary resources are available, including: an appropriate horse, available volunteer support, and a program opening that meets the individual's needs. Following is criteria that must be met for a potential client to move forward in the enrollment process:

Who We Serve: SMILES programs are offered to individuals with physical, cognitive, sensory, and learning disabilities.

Age: All prospective clients must be at least 4 years of age. There is no maximum age requirement. Prospective clients must be able to physically and safely perform what is required in the program they are enrolled in.

Weight: Accurate and up-to-date height and weight information is essential to ensure the safety of both the client and the horse. *While maximum weight limits are provided below, decision's about a client's ability to participate in mounted programming will be based on the availability of a suitable horse that can accommodate the client's height, weight, and balance needs.*

- *150-pound limit* for clients who require side walker assistance due to balance issues, poor postural control, or those with active seizure conditions. This limit ensures our staff and volunteer team can provide proper support while maintaining the safety of the client.
- *300-pound limit* for well-balanced, centered clients who do not require side walker assistance, *contingent upon the availability of a suitable horse.*

Contraindications for the Mounted Program: Mounted horseback riding is not an appropriate activity for everybody. As a PATH Intl. Premier Accredited Center, SMILES must follow their guidelines. According to PATH Intl., riding is contraindicated if:

- The safety or comfort of the horse is compromised.
- The client exceeds the weight limit established by SMILES.
- The staff is unable to safely manage the client in any situation, including an emergency dismount.
- The client meets criteria on the PATH Intl. list of Precautions and Contraindications. (see Client Information Sheet, page 2, the last page of this packet.)
- The staff and/or volunteer team cannot manage the client's behaviors with verbal prompts and/or light touch.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

SMILES offers Therapeutic/Adaptive Riding (mounted) and HEARTS (unmounted) programs. There is a description of each program on the following pages. SMILES runs in four 8-week sessions throughout the year, and once a client is enrolled at a specific class day/time, clients continue at that same day/time for the entire session. All programming is directly supervised by a PATH Intl. Certified Instructor.

Therapeutic/Adaptive Riding

Therapeutic/Adaptive Riding lessons are equestrian skill-based lessons. The focus of lessons is skill development and progression while improving the client's physical, cognitive, emotional, sensory and/or social skills. Instructors develop unique lesson plans to meet the needs of clients, and at the same time, make lessons fun and interesting to everyone.

Clients attend once per week for a 45-minute lesson, in a small-group setting of up to six clients. Group lessons are beneficial due to the opportunity to interact with other clients and families, as well as learn from other clients. Trained volunteers assist with lessons.

Benefits of Therapeutic/Adaptive Riding

- The movement of the horse mimics the human gait by being rhythmic, repeatable, and three-dimensional- all movements needed to simulate normal walking patterns.
- Components such as music, colors, numbers, and shape recognition can be built into sessions to simulate learning.
- Clients can improve their communication and social interactions as they interact with peers, volunteers, instructors, and horses.
- Clients receive a multitude of other physical benefits, such as increased strength, increased flexibility and range of motion, and improved balance.



HEARTS- Horse Experiences and Activities Resulting in Therapeutic Success

Great for both the rider and non-rider, the HEARTS program is an engaging one-on-one session that immerses clients in the world of horse care. Clients participate in supervised lessons focused on communicating with the horse and handling the horse safely from the ground. Through these interactions, clients develop empathy by learning to interpret and respond to the horse's behaviors and needs, fostering a mutual bond of trust. They also build confidence and functional life skills, such as time management and responsibility.

HEARTS is a 30-minute program which caters to each client's individual needs and goals. Certified Instructors supervise HEARTS lessons and trained volunteers assist. HEARTS is exclusively an unmounted program.

Benefits of HEARTS

- Each session incorporates activities that enhance both gross and fine motor skills, including tasks like grooming with different tools, saddling, and fastening buckles.
- Clients learn to increase their balance and coordination, as they are constantly reaching and stretching during HEARTS activities.
- Emotionally, clients learn to connect with their horse and form a partnership. Through this partnership, clients develop skills in trust, respect, and leadership. Mastering new skills not only boosts self-esteem but also motivates clients to explore new experiences.
- Grooming and saddling follows a specific sequence, fostering routine and enhancing recall and sequencing skills. Additionally, this program introduces new vocabulary and enhances attention and focus abilities.



Books in the Barn

Books in the Barn is an enriching program offered at SMILES where clients of all ages and abilities have the opportunity to read to the horses. In this calming environment, participants can sit by the stalls while sharing their favorite stories with their equine companions. The presence of the horses creates a peaceful and supportive atmosphere, encouraging clients to practice reading skills and build confidence without judgment. The horses' quiet attentiveness provides a soothing backdrop, helping readers relax and enjoy reading in a unique and meaningful way.

Benefits of Books in the Barn

- Clients have the opportunity to read books to our specially trained, patient, and non-judgmental horses. This interactive reading experience promotes confidence, communication skills, and a love for reading.
- Research has shown that interactions with horses can have therapeutic benefits, including reduced stress and anxiety, improved focus, and enhanced emotional well-being.
- Books in the Barn offers a supportive environment for the clients. The facility is equipped with trained staff, trained horses, and safety protocols to ensure an enjoyable experience.



SMILES CLIENT POLICIES

These policies were established to ensure the quality and safety of programming for our clients, volunteers, horses, staff and visitors.

Client Paperwork

- All clients must have completed all center paperwork prior to participation (e-signatures are accepted.) These forms must be updated annually. Clients with Down Syndrome must have an annual medical clearance from a licensed physician that includes a neurological exam that specifically denies any symptoms consistent with atlantoaxial instability (AAI)
- Clients are responsible for all financial costs for services provided by SMILES. SMILES will bill third parties on a client's behalf with agencies we currently contract with. For questions regarding billing, please email info@visitsmiles.org.

Weight Limits

Accurate and up-to-date client height and weight information is essential to ensure the safety of both the client and the horse. *While maximum weight limits are provided below, decisions about a client's ability to participate in mounted programming will be based on the availability of a suitable horse that can accommodate the client's height, weight, and balance needs. Maximum weights are as follows:*

- 150-pound limit for clients who require side walker assistance due to balance issues, poor postural control, or those with active seizure conditions. This limit ensures our staff and volunteer team can provide proper support while maintaining the safety of the client.
- 300-pound limit for well-balanced, centered clients who do not require side walker assistance. Enrollment/continuation in the mounted program for a client in this weight category is contingent upon the availability of a suitable horse.

Program Placement

SMILES reserves the right to determine whether mounted or unmounted activities are safe and suitable for both the horse and client. All prospective clients will be evaluated in person, and staff will make participation decisions in accordance with PATH Intl. Precautions and Contraindications. Returning clients will be re-evaluated as needed based on any changes in their medical, physical, cognitive, or behavioral status. Please notify SMILES of any changes to a client's health. SMILES reserves the right to deny services to any individual if there are concerns for the health and/or safety of the clients, volunteers, staff, or horses.

SMILES CLIENT POLICIES, CON'T.

Contraindications to the Mounted Riding Program

Mounted horseback riding is not an appropriate activity for everybody. As a PATH Intl. Premier Accredited Center, SMILES must follow the guidelines established by PATH Intl. A contraindication is a specific condition, factor, or circumstance in which participation in the program may pose a significant risk or harm to the client, horse, or staff/volunteer. According to PATH Intl. guidelines, riding is contraindicated if:

- The safety or comfort of the horse is compromised.
- The client exceeds the weight limit established by SMILES.
- The staff is unable to safely manage the client in any situation, including an emergency dismount.
- The client meets criteria on the PATH Intl. list of Precautions and Contraindications.
- The staff and/or volunteer team cannot manage the client's behaviors with verbal prompts and/or light touch.

Unmounted programming (HEARTS) may be offered to individuals who may not be best served by the Therapeutic/Adaptive Riding program. SMILES reserves the right to discontinue an individual's participation in any program should it be deemed in the best interest of either the client or SMILES.

General Program Policies

- All clients must wear ASTM/SEI approved helmets (provided by SMILES if needed) and closed-toed/closed-heeled shoes. It is recommended that clients wear long pants when around the horses and when riding.
- A family member or care provider must be on the property during the entire program time for any client under the age of 18.
- If a client becomes unseated during a mounted class, for the safety of the client and the horse, the client will not re-mount. The client will have the option to complete the class with unmounted activities.
- SMILES prioritizes the well-being of both our clients and horses. SMILES reserves the right to reassign any horse used in the program if the horse becomes injured, ill, or for any other reason is unable to work during a client's scheduled program time. In cases when there is no alternative horse available, there may be times a client will be assigned to unmounted programming as an alternative.
- There are no dogs allowed on the SMILES property. Service Animals are welcome in the SMILES lobby and throughout the property. Please keep Service Animals a safe distance from the horses.
- SMILES is a smoke-free and drug-free environment.

SMILES CLIENT POLICIES, CON'T.

Attendance

At SMILES, our goal is to provide consistent and effective programming to all clients. To ensure the best experience for everyone, we have implemented the following attendance policy:

- Clients are expected to maintain regular attendance at SMILES. No make-up classes are offered.
- If a client misses two or more classes within an 8-week session without notifying staff ("no-show") the client will not be allowed to register for the next session.
- If a client cancels four or more classes within an 8-week session, the client will not be allowed to register for the next session. Special circumstances impacting attendance will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis to ensure the best possible outcomes for our clients.
- In the event of a cancellation due to weather conditions, staff absence, or volunteer support, SMILES will notify clients via Facebook, email, and through phone/text.
- To cancel for a client's scheduled class, please call our cancellation line at (262) 882-3470, option 1, or email classes@visitsmiles.org.

Volunteer Opportunities for Clients

SMILES offers clients volunteer opportunities at special events throughout the year. We do not offer volunteer opportunities for clients in the barn or with the horses. If clients are interested in learning more about horse care, including hands-on activities, we encourage them to explore our HEARTS program, which offers structured, safe, and engaging experiences with the horses. We will communicate all volunteer opportunities to clients as they arise.

Client Dismissal Policies

Clients may be dismissed from the program for any of the reasons listed below:

- Any unsafe, combative, disruptive behavior, or inappropriate physical contact by clients, family members, care providers, or visitors toward staff, volunteers, clients, or horses.
- Destruction of SMILES property by clients, family members, care providers, or visitors.
- Any harassment including but not limited to offensive, physical, written/spoken conduct of a sexual or derogatory nature or based on an individual's race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, genetic information, protected veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity or any other characteristic protected by federal, state or local law.
- Nonpayment of program fees.
- Failure to adhere to the attendance policy as outlined.
- The development of a contraindicated condition or the deterioration of a condition to the point that the SMILES program is no longer beneficial, could be harmful to the client, or where safety for the client, staff or volunteer team, or the horse has become a concern.
- Weight gain above the maximums stated previously for the mounted program. Unmounted programming may be offered to individuals who exceed our maximum weight limits.
- Failure to complete all required center paperwork.

SMILES CLIENT FEES 2026

All payments must be submitted prior to the session start.

- 8-week Therapeutic/Adaptive Riding Session- \$480
- 8-week unmounted HEARTS session- \$300
- Books in the Barn- No Cost

Third-party funding is accepted from agencies such as CLTS, IRIS/I-LIFE, and more

Financial Assistance

Scholarships are available for clients involved in either program that SMILES offers. Scholarships are based on annual income with considerations made to your current family and income situation. Scholarship aid is awarded annually, and you must apply every year. If awarded scholarship aid, you may use that towards an 8-week session of Therapeutic/Adaptive Riding or HEARTS, twice per year.

If interested in applying for scholarship aid, please contact our Business Coordinator:

☎ (262) 882-3470, option 5

✉ info@visitsmiles.org

Because our registration fees are less than half of our actual operating expense per lesson, we do not offer credits or make-ups for missed lessons.

COMMUNICATION

- Email is the primary means of communication at SMILES. Please make sure we have your current email. To ensure you receive all communication, please add classes@visitsmiles.org and info@visitsmiles.org to your safe sender list in your email.
- SMILES has a Facebook page that is updated regularly regarding our program, special events, weather cancellations, and more. Please follow us on Facebook: www.facebook.com/SMILESTherapeuticRiding
- Please visit the SMILES website for more information about our program and events: www.visitsmiles.org

CONFIDENTIALITY

All written and verbal information about SMILES clients is confidential and will not be shared without the express written consent of the client, or if a minor, a parent or care provider.

EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

Emergency procedures are paramount in the overall operation of the program. SMILES Instructors are trained in first aid and CPR/AED, and are responsible for overseeing emergency procedures. Volunteers receive special training about safety procedures. Instructors will determine the extent of any injury, should one occur, and call for medical assistance as needed. Instructors will file an Occurrence Report for all emergencies, accidents, or safety violations. Please inform your Instructor of any accident, no matter how minor it may seem.

In case of injury, there is a First Aid Kit and AED located in the SMILES lobby.

Fire



- Mounted clients will be dismounted as quickly and safely as possible.
- All clients, volunteers, family members, and guests will go to the Emergency Meet Location, which is the flagpole by the outdoor arena/driveway.
- A head count will be taken to make sure everyone is accounted for. Everyone is to remain in the safety area until told to leave by an Instructor or staff member.

Severe Weather



- Mounted clients will be dismounted as quickly and safely as possible.
- All clients, volunteers, family members, and guests will go to the designated severe weather shelters:
 - The two restrooms in the SMILES lobby
 - The logo-wear room, which is in the indoor arena (near the mounting block)
 - The Volunteer Office, which is near the entrance of the horse barn

Emergency Contact Information



- Emergency contact information is found at every phone in the facility.
- The nearest landline phone is in the SMILES office, the very first cubicle when you enter the office.

IMPORTANT REMINDERS

Horse Selection: Clients are matched with horses for a variety of reasons, including the horse's type of movement and unique physical attributes. Our Certified Instructors are trained in assessing which horse may provide the most benefits for the client and their goals, and as such, it is the exclusive decision of the Instructor.

SMILES Instructors may have to reassign a horse used in the program if the horse becomes injured, ill, or for any other reason is unable to work during a client's scheduled class time. In such cases, there may be times a client will be assigned unmounted programming as an alternative.

Cancellations: If you are unable to attend your regularly scheduled lesson, or if you will be late, please call the **Cancellation Hotline at (262) 882-3470, option 1.** If a staff member does not answer, please leave a voicemail. SMILES does not offer make-ups when cancellations occur.

If SMILES must cancel due to weather conditions, staff absence, or volunteer support, SMILES will notify clients via Facebook, email, and through phone/text. Please follow us on Facebook at: **www.facebook.com/SMILESTherapeuticRiding**

SMILES Instructors: During every program lesson, the Instructor is in charge. All SMILES Instructors are PATH Intl. Certified. They have been trained to handle a variety of situations in the most appropriate way. Safety is always first and foremost.



2026 SMILES Session Calendar

Session Dates	Enrollment deadline for clients currently enrolled in programming	Enrollment window for NEW clients or clients returning after taking a session(s) off*
Winter Session January 5 - February 28	November 22	November 24 - December 15
Spring Session March 28 - May 22	February 28	March 2 - March 13
Summer Session June 29 - August 22	May 22	May 26 - June 9
Fall Session September 28 - November 21	August 22	August 24 - September 7

*Contacting SMILES by an enrollment deadline does not guarantee placement into one of our programs. Many factors go into scheduling. Once we have received your Client Information Sheet, you will be contacted with more details.




2026 SMILES Special Events

SMILES will contact clients and families for volunteer opportunities throughout the year at our special events!

SMILES Tack Sale Saturday, March 21	National Volunteer Week April 19 - 25	Mane Event Golf Outing Wednesday, June 17	Superstar Horse Show & Open House Saturday, September 12	SMILES Fall Festival Saturday, October 17
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ENROLLMENT INFORMATION

SMILES maintains a waitlist of prospective clients wanting to join our programs. To be added to our waitlist, please take the following steps:

- U Carefully read all of the information found in this packet.
- U Complete the attached New Client Information Sheet and submit to SMILES in one of the following ways. SMILES will contact you to confirm receipt of this information sheet.
 -  Email to classes@visitsmiles.org
 -  Fax to (262) 882-5661
 -  Drop off at the SMILES Facility during normal business hours, Monday-Friday, 8am-4pm.
N2666 County Road K, Darien, WI 53114
- U As program openings occur, SMILES will contact you to schedule an in-person evaluation. During the evaluation, we will give you a tour of the facility, discuss client goals, discuss programming and curriculum, and observe basic interactions around a horse. Please note that an evaluation does not guarantee placement in one of our programs. A spot can only be confirmed after a thorough assessment of the individual's needs and availability within our programs. If there is not an opening that fits the prospective client's needs, they will be placed back on the waiting list. The Program Coordinator will make contact as soon as an appropriate spot becomes available.
- U Following the evaluation, if the prospective client is approved for programming, you will be contacted about your place on the schedule.

Thank you for your interest in becoming a client at SMILES!

NEW CLIENT INFORMATION SHEET

If you are interested in joining the programs at SMILES, please fill out the information below. Once we receive this information, we will contact you to either confirm placement on the waiting list, or we will request more information about any precautions or contraindications.

PROGRAM INTEREST: **Therapeutic/Adaptive Riding** **HEARTS (unmounted)** **Both**

TODAY'S DATE	<input type="text"/>		
CLIENT NAME	<input type="text"/>	DOB	<input type="text"/>
ADDRESS	<input type="text"/>		
PARENT/ CAREGIVER	<input type="text"/>		
EMAIL	<input type="text"/>	PHONE	<input type="text"/>
FUNDER SOURCE (if applicable)	CLTS	IRIS/I-LIFE	OTHER <input type="text"/>
CASE MANAGER NAME	<input type="text"/>	EMAIL	<input type="text"/>
HEIGHT	<input type="text"/>	WEIGHT	<input type="text"/>
		GENDER	<input type="text"/>
DIAGNOSIS	<input type="text"/>		

BRIEFLY DESCRIBE THE CLIENT- LIKES/DISLIKES, FUNCTIONAL STATUS, PHYSICAL ABILITIES, ETC.

LIST ANY GOALS YOU HAVE FOR THE CLIENT PARTICIPATING IN THERAPEUTIC HORSEMANSHIP.

WHAT IS THE CLIENT'S PREFERRED AVAILABILITY FOR PROGRAMMING? SMILES has weekday morning, evening, and Saturday programming available.

PLEASE COMPLETE THE MEDICAL HISTORY ON THE BACK SIDE OF THIS FORM



CLIENT MOBILITY: **Independent Ambulation** **Crutches/Braces** **Wheelchair**

IF THE CLIENT HAS A SEIZURE DISORDER, PLEASE SHARE THE TYPE OF SEIZURE, FREQUENCY, IF THEY ARE CONTROLLED, TYPICAL MOTOR ACTIVITY, AND POSSIBLE TRIGGERS.

Precautions and Contraindications to Consider Prior to Therapeutic Horsemanship

ORTHOPEDIC

- ☐ Atlantoaxial Instability
- ☐ Coxarthrosis
- ☐ Cranial Deficits
- ☐ Heterotopic Ossification/Myositis Ossificans
- ☐ Joint Subluxation/Dislocation
- ☐ Osteoporosis
- ☐ Pathologic Fractures
- ☐ Spinal Joint Fusion/Fixation
- ☐ Spinal Joint Instability/Abnormalities

MEDICAL

- | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Allergies | <input type="checkbox"/> PVD |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cardiac Condition | <input type="checkbox"/> Hemophilia |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Blood Pressure Control | <input type="checkbox"/> Medical |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Instability | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Migraines | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Respiratory Compromise | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Recent Surgeries | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Exacerbations of medical conditions | |

NEUROLOGIC/OTHER

- ☐ Hydrocephalus/Shunt
- ☐ Seizure
- ☐ Spina Bifida/Chiari II Malformation
- ☐ Tethered Cord/Hydromyelia
- ☐ Age- Under four years old
- ☐ Indwelling Catheters/Medical Equipment
- ☐ Medications i.e. photosensitivity
- ☐ Poor Endurance
- ☐ Skin Breakdown

PSYCHOLOGICAL

- ☐ Animal Abuse
- ☐ Dangerous to self or others
- ☐ Physical/Sexual/Emotional Abuse
- ☐ Fire Setting
- ☐ Substance Abuse
- ☐ Thought Control Disorders
- ☐ Weight Control Disorders

IF ANY OF THE ABOVE CONDITIONS APPLY, PLEASE EXPOUND AS TO WHAT DEGREE:

DATE:

CLIENT/PARENT/GUARDIAN SIGNATURE:

PLEASE RETURN THIS COMPLETED FORM TO SMILES:

classes@visitsmiles.org

(262) 882-5661 (fax)

N2666 County Road K, Darien, WI 53114