



## Turning Point Ranch Equine Selection Process

Horses used in therapeutic riding programs must possess a particularly gentle and empathetic temperament and be consistently unflappable. While age and experience contribute to those characteristics, the ideal therapy horse must also be healthy enough for regular use and without a dependence on expensive medical and dietary supplements that can negatively impact the budget of a non-profit organization. A therapy horse needs to be of a size that can carry a 200 lb rider and/or short enough that a 5 ft tall sidewalker can effectively support a rider. Therefore, in selecting horses for its therapy program Turning Point will consider soundness, age, the equine's medical/lameness history, the equine's behavioral history and temperament as well as the specific needs of our program in regard to the size and disabilities of our riders and the types of activities regularly incorporated in our sessions.

Based on those premises, Turning Point Ranch has adopted the following guidelines for selection of equine team members for purchase or donation:

1. Conditional selection of any horse must be approved by the Board of Directors following recommendation from a site team generally comprised of a Board representative, the herd manager and one other designee – usually an instructor or the Executive Director.
2. Generally, Turning Point will only select horses:
  - Between the ages of 8 and 14 (exceptions can be made)
  - No taller than 15.3 hands (exceptions can be made)
  - Without deformities, lameness or pharmaceutical needs (i.e. bute)
  - Without a history of behavioral issues
3. Evaluation leading to conditional selection is to be performed at the home location of a prospective therapy horse BEFORE the horse is brought to Turning Point.
4. On-site evaluation includes but is not limited to:
  - Observation of the horse standing quietly while being groomed and tacked
  - Observation of the horse being easily caught
  - Observation of conformation and gait with the owner leading the horse
  - Observation of gait and behavior with owner riding
  - Observation of comfort level with sidewalkers while owner leads
  - Observation of reaction to loud noises and balls or Frisbees
  - Actual riding/tack adjustment of horse by team member

5. The evaluation team should complete the TPR Evaluation Form which includes information on conformation, shape, size, suitability for riders with disabilities, movement analysis at walk , trot and canter in addition to observed behaviors.
6. The evaluation team will make a recommendation to the full board regarding conditional acceptance of a horse. All horses are accepted conditionally for a 4-12 week evaluation period and owners will be required to sign a contract that stipulates the horse will be returned if it does not meet required standards during the 4-12 week evaluation period.
7. During the 4-12 week evaluation period PATH certified staff including the Herd Manager and Executive Director will observe and document the horse's willingness to:
  - Stand quietly when groomed, tacked, during mounting and dismounting, during exercises and other activities conducted at the halt
  - Behave appropriately with other equines
  - Behave appropriately with personnel, volunteers, and participants
  - Respond appropriately to the participant's aids, both natural and artificial
  - Stand quietly during mounting and dismounting procedures
  - Be around wheelchairs and other assistive devices
  - Being led from either side at the walk and trot
  - Have sidewalkers working closely on both sides
  - Be around games and special equipment
  - Accept loud noises, erratic behavior
  - Accept mane tugging, hair plucking, hugging as needed.
8. At the end of the end of the 4th week, staff will take a vote on whether the horse is invited to stay the next 30 days for evaluation in classes with students.
9. At the end of the 8th week, staff will vote again on whether the horse is invited to stay the next 30 days. Once the horse knows expectations, his behavior will hopefully show us if he likes the job.
10. At the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> week, the Executive Director will make a recommendation to the board regarding the acceptability of the horse for our program.
11. The Board will make the final decision on the acceptance of any horse, on the number of horses in the herd and on the retirement of any horse from the herd.
12. While national statistics show the average service life of a therapy horse is 5 years, Turning Point Ranch aims for a comprehensive equine selection process, program of feed, veterinary care, conditioning and variety of experiences to extend the working life of our horses to 10-15 years.