

VOLUNTEER *handbook*

Victoria Therapeutic Riding Association (VTRA)

6917 Veyaness Road

Saanichton, BC V8M 1W1

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Handbook last updated in July 2025



Welcome from our Volunteer Coordinator

Welcome to the VTRA!

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to all the volunteers who actively engage with VTRA. Your dedication is the lifeblood of our organization, and it is your positive attitude, adaptability, and eagerness to help others that truly make a difference. The enthusiasm and willingness to learn that you bring enable us to provide exceptional support to our riders and horses.

Volunteers are vital to our organization. Each week, we serve 100 participants, supported by over 80 dedicated volunteers who make our programs possible. Thank you for choosing VTRA and for your commitment to our mission.

As the Volunteer Coordinator, I love stepping out of the office to get to know our volunteers and witness firsthand the impact of your time and effort on our participants. It's truly inspiring to see the love and care you share with our horses and the difference you make in the lives of those we serve.

Volunteers are the heart and soul of VTRA, and we offer our deepest appreciation to each and every one of you. Your contribution is invaluable, and we look forward to achieving great things together.

Finally, we would like to respectfully acknowledge that we operate on the traditional territories of the Lkwungen (Esquimalt and Songhees) and WSÁNEĆ (Pauquachin, Tsartlip, Tsawout, Tseycum) peoples. We are grateful to be able to teach, and learn on these beautiful lands.

Best regards,

Kathleen Chateau,

Volunteer Coordinator

volunteer@vtra.ca

778-426-0506

Hours of operation

Monday 9am-5:30pm

Tuesday: 9am-5:30pm

Wednesday: 9am-5:30pm

Thursday: 9am- 7:30pm

Friday: 9am - noon

Saturday: Closed

Sunday: Closed

VTRA is closed on all stat holidays. In the event of inclement weather, volunteers will be notified by email and the Volunteer Facebook Page will also have notice of any closures.

2025/2026 Term:

Term 1 - September 15 - October 31

Term 2 - November 10 - December 19

Term 3 - January 12 - March 13

Term 4 - April 7 - June 12

2026 Spring Break Camps:

Kids' Camp: March 16-20

Teen Camp : March 23-27

2026 Summer Camps:

Adult Workshop: June 22-24

Kids' Camps: July 6-10 & August 10-14

Teen Camps: July 13-17 & August 17-21

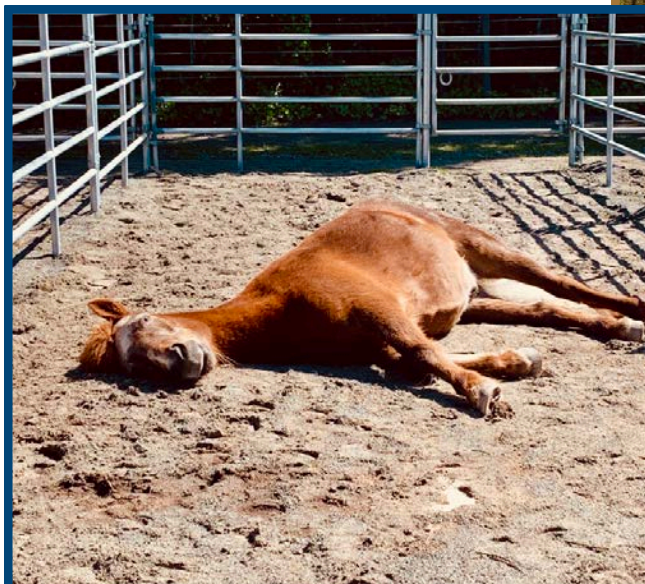
2025/2026 Special Events:

Deck the stalls - November 29

Annual Horse Show - June 13

Picnic with the herd - July 11

And when nothing is happening we cuddle and rest!



About VTRA and our participants

OUR VISION

Learning, connection, and joy through the power of horses.

OUR MISSION

Build individual capacity through human and horse teamwork.

OUR COMMITMENT

The VTRA is committed to inclusivity, diversity, equity and equine welfare—we value difference and individuality and a proactive and adaptive approach to meeting our members needs. Our mission is to serve others. We provide opportunities for people of all abilities to connect, learn, grow and thrive. This is at the heart of everything we do.

OUR HISTORY

The Victoria Therapeutic Riding Association (VTRA) was formed in 1982 to provide a therapeutic riding experience to children and adults with diverse abilities throughout the Greater Victoria area. Today, VTRA is a non-profit charitable organization that uses horseback riding as a recognized therapeutic tool and offers a variety of equine-assisted services programs to more than 200 children, youth and adults throughout the region. VTRA is supported by a volunteer board, a small staff team, 13 horses and 200+ dedicated volunteers who enable participants to benefit each week.

OUR PARTICIPANTS

VTRA supports a diverse group of individuals, ages 4 and up with a variety of diagnoses, including but not limited to: ASD, ADHD, cerebral palsy, brain injury, anxiety, depression and Down syndrome.

OUR INSTRUCTORS

VTRA has a dedicated team of seven instructors with a strong equine background, as well as an understanding of various abilities. Our instructors are certified by CanTRA (Canada Therapeutic Riding Association) and have levels of First Aids.

Benefits of Equine Assisted Activities



PHYSICAL

- Improving muscle control and strength
- Improving balance
- Stretching tight or spastic muscles
- Increasing range of motion
- Improving fine and gross motor skills
- Developing sensory integration skills



SOCIAL

- Encouraging friendships with fellow horse lovers
- Including people of all abilities
- Improving communication skills through group activities



COGNITIVE

- Developing problem solving skills
- Working on focusing on instructions and activities
- Vocalizing commands to guide horse
- Improving motor planning and sequencing to complete activities



EMOTIONAL

- Developing confidence and improving self-esteem
- Gaining a sense of purpose
- Overcoming fear and anxiety



VTRA programs

Adaptive Riding is a mounted program emphasizing the development of riding skills, client-centered goals, and social interaction..



Adaptive Driving is designed to teach horse-drawn cart-driving skills. Lessons focus on the development of driving skills and are tailored to individual goals. This programs offers participants of virtually all ages and all abilities the chance to learn to drive a cart pulled by a horse.



Adaptive Stable Management is an unmounted program designed to teach essential horse safety, grooming techniques, leading skills, and day-to-day care. Beyond these practical skills, interacting with horses offers valuable opportunities for personal growth, including improved communication, self-regulation, confidence building, and an enhanced understanding of body language.



Equine Assisted Learning (EAL) is an unmounted program ran by certified facilitators working with participants to explore personal growth skills such as: communication, compassion, teamwork, leadership and so much more.





Early Intervention/Hippotherapy is a mounted program designed for children with diverse abilities under the age of 6. Lessons are taught by a physiotherapist and focus on games to promote reaching, balance reactions, postural control, coordination, communication and confidence.



VTRA program details

- All programs are held at our facility located at **6917 Veyaness Rd** in Central Saanich
- We offer 45-minute group lessons of up to four participants, and 30-minute semi-private lessons for two participants at a time
- VTRA offers classes between September and June. Our program year is divided into 4 terms, which vary in length from 6-10 weeks

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
9:30am Physical Mobility - all ages 10:45am Physical Mobility - all ages 12pm Progressive Skills - Adults 2:30pm Early Participants 3:30pm Recreational - Kids 4:45pm Recreational - Teens	9:30am Recreational - Kids & Teens 10:45am Physical Mobility - all ages 12pm Progressive Skills - Adults 2:30pm Early Participants 3:30pm Recreational - Kids 4:45pm Recreational - Teens & Kids	9:00am - 12pm Equine Assisted Learning 2:30pm Early Participants 3:30pm Recreational - Kids 4:45pm Progressive Skills - Teens 2:30pm Kids 3:30pm Kids 4:30pm Teens & Adults	9:30am Adaptive Driving 10:15am Adaptive Driving 9:30am Kids 10:30am Teens & Adults 11:30am Teens & Adults 11:15am Physical Mobility - Level 2 Adults 4:00pm Recreational - Kids & Teens 5:15pm Progressive skills - Teens 6:30pm Progressive skills - Teens	9:00am - 12:30pm Early Intervention / Hippotherapy

 Adaptive Riding Lesson
  Adaptive Stable Management Lesson

**Please note that the schedule may change due to various circumstances.*

General volunteer requirements

Anyone interested in volunteering must meet the following requirements:

- Complete an application, which includes providing emergency medical consent, photo and liability release.
- Must be at least 16 years old.
- Youth under 18 years old must have a parent/guardian signature prior to participating in trainings or volunteering.
- Clear Criminal Record.
- Attend training sessions as required for each role (to be completed again after one year inactive) . It is mandatory to attend training sessions once a year to stay up to date with VTRA's standards.
- Let Volunteer Coordinator know of changes in address, phone numbers, or email, as well as changes in health or recent physical injuries.
- Volunteers should be comfortable around horses, but it is not necessary to have a high level of horsemanship skills.
- Volunteers should have a reasonable level of fitness. Able to walk briskly for 45 minutes to an hour on uneven grounds and able to jog for short distance with arm at shoulder height.
- VTRA encourages volunteers to get trained in multiple roles. Volunteers may be asked to change roles due to a participant or volunteer absence. These role changes ensure the VTRA is able to offer a high quality and safe program to the participant.



Volunteer position description

- Program Roles



SIDE WALKERS

Walk beside the participants during their lessons and offer support as needed.

- Complete Sidewalker training
- Attend Emergency Procedures Training once a year
- No prior horse experience is needed
- Able to walk briskly for 45 minutes and jog for short distances
- Able to maintain hold for 45 minutes

HORSE HANDLERS

Lead the horse during lessons.
Assist participant in navigating and furthering their skills.

- Pass Horse Handler Training
- Attend Emergency Procedures Training once a year
- Have substantial horse experience within the last 5 years
- Able to walk briskly for 45 minutes and jog for short distances

GROOMS

Prepare horses for lessons and assist with barn and facility tasks. Fill-in if there is a absence.

- Pass Groom Training
- Attend Emergency Procedures Training once a year
- Have substantial horse experience within the last 5 years



ADAPTIVE STABLE MANAGEMENT ASSISTANTS

Support the instructor in delivering stable management content in a safe, fun and safe environment.

- Pass Groom/Stable Management Training
- Attend Emergency Procedures Training once a year



ASSISTANT INSTRUCTORS

Assist the instructor in delivering a safe, supportive and fun lesson.

- Pass Horse Handler, Sidewalker, Assistant Instructor Training
- Attend Emergency Procedures Training once a year
- Must have 6 months experience as a horse handler volunteering in the program at VTRA



• Operations Roles

TACK STORE

Help with donation sorting, customer services, cleaning and maintenance.

- Complete Tack Store Training
- No prior horse experience is needed



MAINTENANCE

Perform routine maintenance tasks such as cleaning, painting, and minor repairs.

- Experience in general maintenance, repair work, or related fields is preferred but not required
- Ability to perform physical tasks



BOARD & COMMITTEE

Serve on the board or on one of our committees to help support the program.

- Expertise with board and committee topics on Governance, Human resources, Strategic Planning, Finance, Program/Facilities, or Revenue Generation



Volunteering at VTRA

- Upon arrival

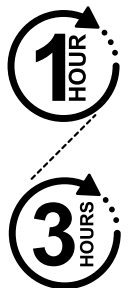
Please park on the left side of the indoor ring along the fence line, leaving the front of the property available for participant parking. Volunteers must sign in at the beginning of their shift and sign out at the end of their shift, your login is the last 4 digits of your phone number. If the system is down, please let the Volunteer Coordinator know that you are here. Pick up your nametag from the display located above the computer.

After logging in and finding your nametag, sidewalkers proceed to the equipment room to check the whiteboard and to wait for their participant while the assistant instructor, horse handlers, and grooms head into the barn to check the chalkboard for the horse assignments. For other positions please check with the Volunteer Coordinator for where you're needed.

If you have been volunteering for less than 6 months, add a golden pin to your nametag. It helps everyone recognize new faces.

- Attendance and absenteeism

Ideally, VTRA would like volunteers to commit to at least one regular shift per week for an entire term. Shifts range from one to three hours depending on the role (7 to 10 weeks). Committing to a regular shift helps create the best quality program for our participants since this gives everyone more familiarity when working together. However, we also have fill-in shifts available every term due to volunteer absences. If you are unable to attend a shift, please notify the VTRA as soon as possible because if we do not have enough volunteers, the participants cannot ride.



VTRA uses an online portal called **VicNet** to sign-up for shifts. Shifts on VicNet vary in length. The length of a shift depends on the needs of the participants. Shifts are dependent on the enrollment of our participants in classes.

You are extremely important to the successful operation of our program! VTRA could not function without our volunteers. We depend on you to be punctual, dependable, and to attempt to meet the schedule to which you have agreed whenever possible. In the event of an unscheduled absence, such as illness or emergency, or if you are running late, please call our main number at **778-426-0506** to ensure your message is processed immediately. If the office is closed, please leave a voicemail and send an email to **volunteer@vtra.ca**.

● Dress for safety & comfort

- Wear closed toed shoes. Shoes should be sturdy so that they protect the feet from horses' hooves, and provide good stability on uneven surfaces.
- Wear long pants whenever possible, though walking shorts are acceptable in hot weather.
- Sunglasses, unscented bug spray and sunscreen may be needed for outdoor activities.
- Dress for the weather since riders go on trail rides all year long.
- No dangly necklaces, earrings, bracelets or other hazards.
- Tie long hair back while in the barn or arena. If needed, extra hair ties are in the Tack Room #2 in the barn.
- Jackets should be zipped, and scarves should be tucked in to your jacket to prevent clothing from being grabbed by or caught on a horse and/or participant.
- Do not tie a jacket or sweater around your waist. If you need to remove your jacket, please alert the instructor before leaving your rider.
- Gloves are encouraged, mittens are not permitted for safety reasons.

● Barn rules

- Smoking is not permitted on the premises.
- Service dogs are only permitted in the clubhouse and must be on a leash.
- No dogs allowed in the barn, paddocks, arena or back field.
- Volunteers are not to use their cell phones while volunteering. Please leave your cell phone in your car or in your pocket (on silent). If you are expecting a call, please share our phone number (778-426-0506) and we will take the message for you.



• Ending volunteer service

You may resign from your volunteer service with the organization at any time. As a courtesy volunteers are asked to inform the volunteer coordinator if they want to be put on inactive status or if they want to permanently leave , and may be asked to participate in an exit interview.

• Problem-solving procedure

When a group of people work and volunteer together, problems may arise. VTRA wants to assist you in solving problems and settling concerns quickly and fairly.

Our problem-solving procedure provides you with the opportunity to have a review of any problem, dispute or misunderstanding that arises while volunteering.

- In situations where differences arise between volunteers or volunteers and staff, it is advised to first try to resolve these differences amongst the parties involved.
- If a third party is needed, the Volunteer Coordinator is to be informed and involved. Under no circumstances shall differences be made public or involve other members of the organization.
- If the concern is regarding the Volunteer Coordinator, the Executive Director should be contacted.

**IN THE 2024/ 2025
PROGRAM YEAR, 200
VOLUNTEERS DONATED
OVER 8, 000 HOURS**



● Dismissal

The dismissal of a volunteer is a serious matter and is only considered when necessary to ensure a safe and positive environment for everyone involved with VTRA's activities. Volunteers are expected to adhere to the organization's rules and regulations.

Reasons for Dismissal:

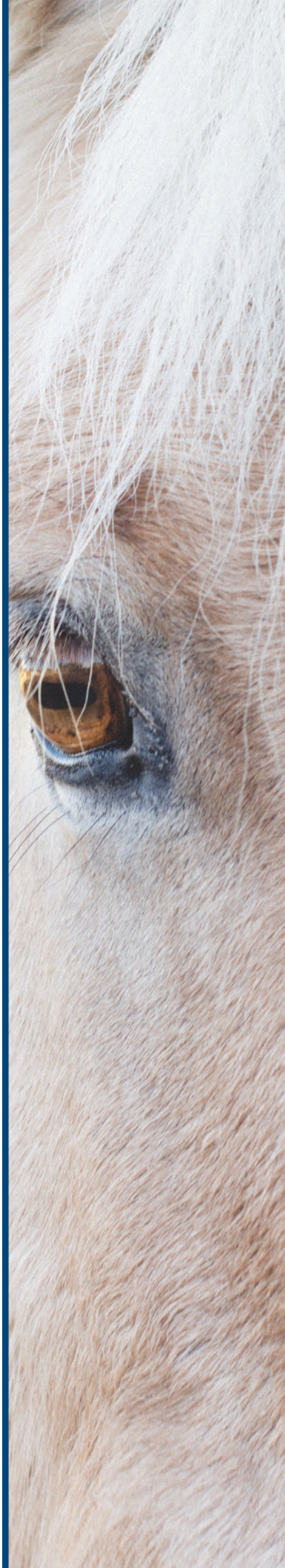
- Unreliability or irresponsibility
- Inappropriate or disruptive behavior
- Failure to comply with VTRA's policies and procedures

● Confidentiality policy

At VTRA, we are committed to maintaining the confidentiality of all volunteer information. We do not share names, addresses, email addresses, or phone numbers without the volunteer's explicit permission.

Confidentiality of Participants: The identity and privacy of all participants are paramount. To respect the privacy rights of our riders and their families, all volunteers are required to sign a Confidentiality Agreement. By signing this agreement, you agree to use appropriate discretion in written comments and conversations with other volunteers, staff, families, or the general public. Any breach of this confidentiality may result in dismissal.

Photography policy: our participants have the option to consent to having their photo taken. If you would like to take a photo of a participant, check with staff first. As a volunteer, you will be asked to sign a photo consent form before volunteering. Please ask your fellow volunteers before photographing them. You may take photos of our horses, and facility without permission. The flash on your camera should be turned off when photographing horses. We encourage you to share your photos with staff (send to volunteer@vtra.ca), as we may be able to post to our social media sites!



● Emergency procedures

In the Event of a Fire, Earthquake, or Other Emergency: Stay Calm, do not panic. Exit the building using the nearest exit.

1. Evacuation Points:

- Meet at the parking lot by the hay barn.
- If you are with a participant, keep them with you; do not try to find their caretaker or family member.
- If you are alone with a horse, place the horse in the nearest stall before proceeding to the meeting point.
- Do not re-enter any buildings, barns, or the arena until the staff announces an all-clear.
- Do not leave the property until every person is accounted for.

Medical Emergency:

- Inform staff immediately if you or someone else is injured.
- First Aid Kits are located in the Tack Room #2 and at the entrance of the indoor ring.
- An AED is located at the entrance of the barn.
- All instructors, as well as many other staff members, are trained in CPR/First Aid.



From left to right: Sara (Instructor), Mary (Instructor), Audrey (Finance Manager), Jess (Instructor), Annie (Board Chair), Liz (Acting Executive Director), Shannon (Instructor), Alicia (Head Instructor), Katleen (Volunteer & Participant Coordinator).

● Volunteer rights & responsibilities

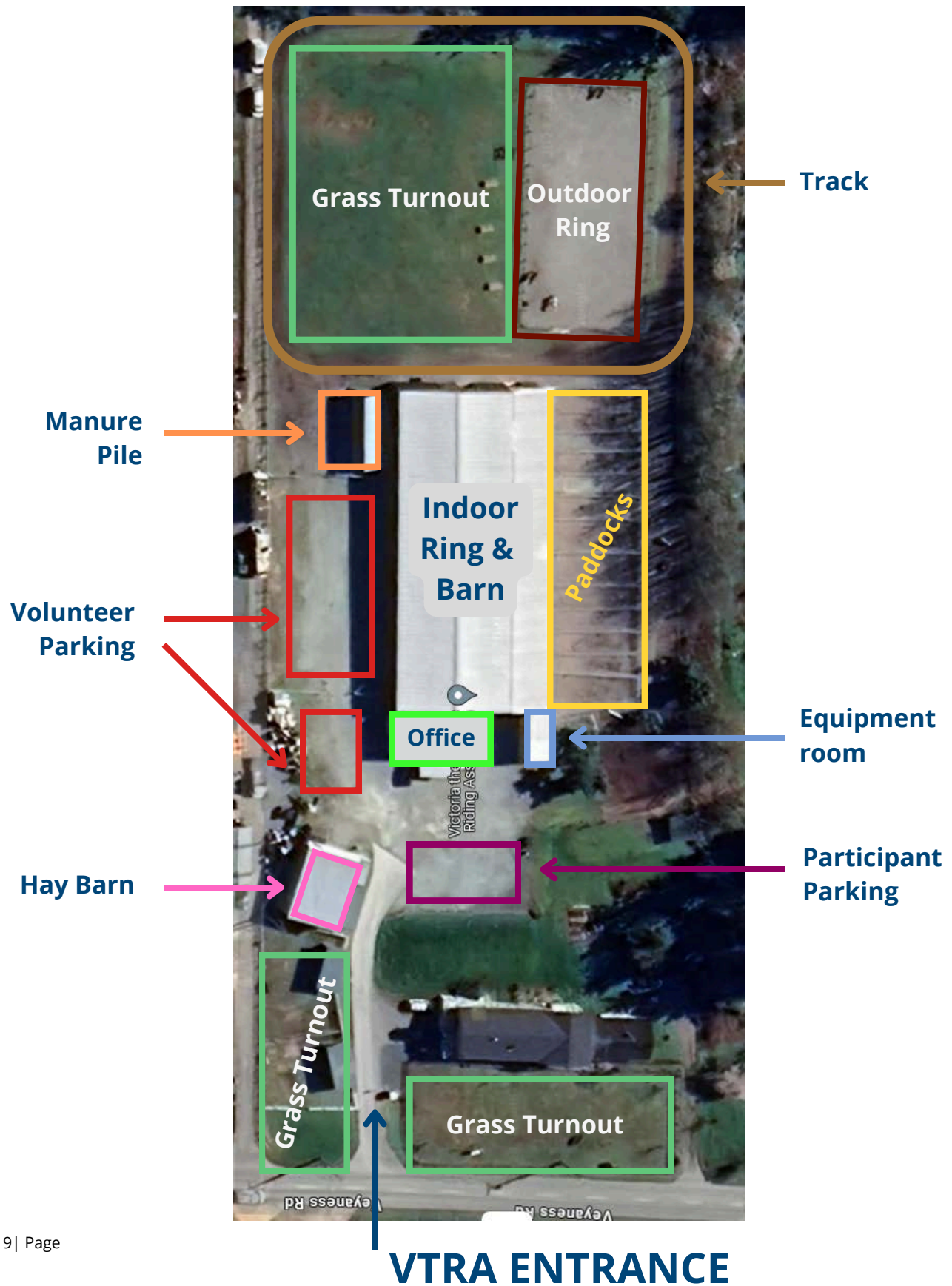
RIGHTS

- **To Clear Role Descriptions:** Receive a clear and comprehensive role description.
- **To Training and Education:** Receive training for your job and have opportunities for continuing education.
- **To New Opportunities:** You have the right to negotiate your volunteer role, discuss ways to shift your role, or take on another project or position that better suits your needs.
- **To Be Heard:** Make suggestions and be shown respect for your honest opinions.
- **To Recognition:** Receive recognition through promotions, awards, events, day-to-day expressions of appreciation, and be treated as a valuable co-worker rather than "free help".
- **To Say "No":** Feel comfortable about saying "no" when necessary.
- **To Confidentiality:** Have your personal information and any private conversations kept confidential.

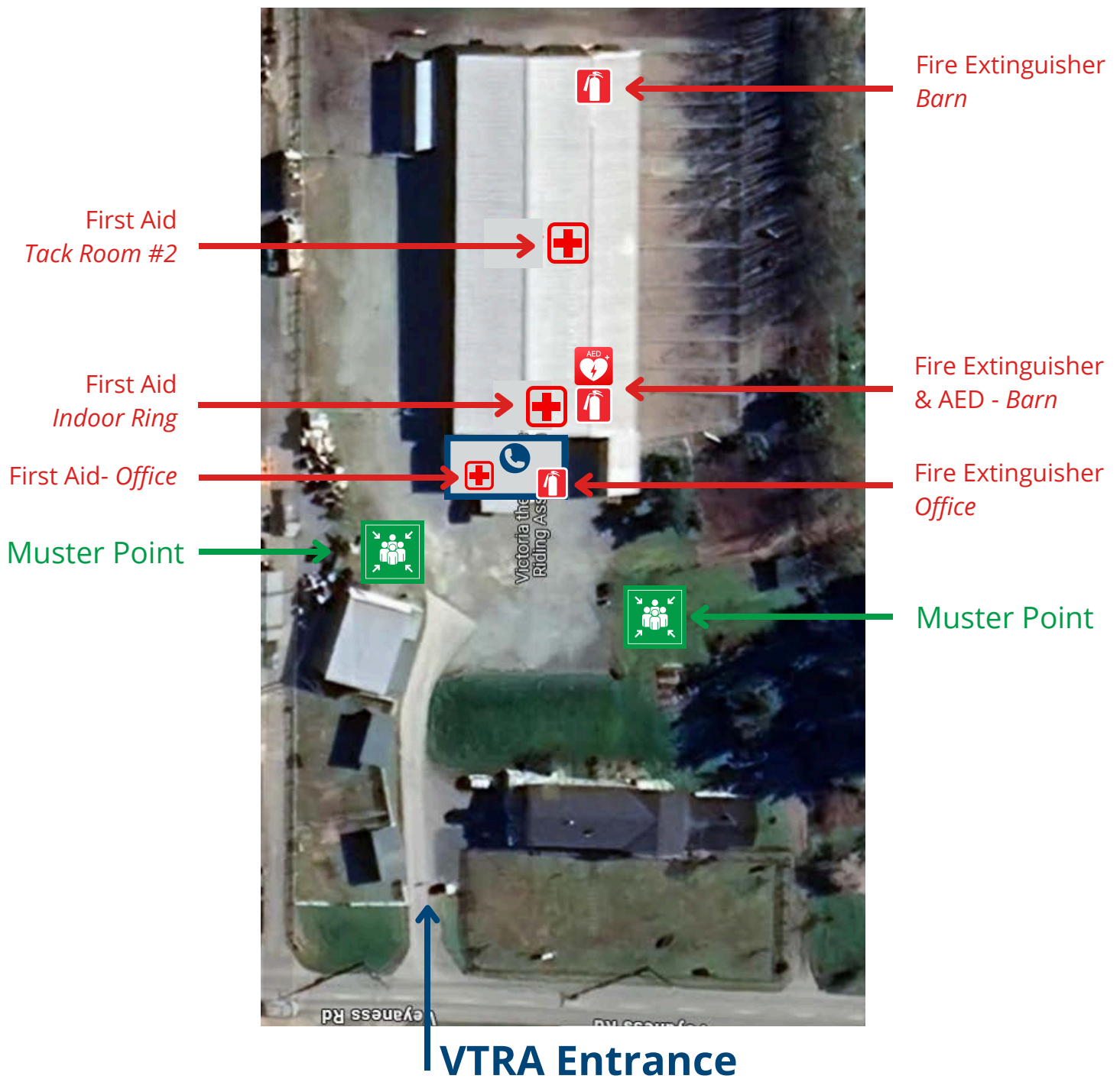
RESPONSIBILITIES

- **To Be Sincere:** Offer your service with sincerity and believe in the value of your position.
- **To Be Reliable and Punctual:** Keep accurate records of hours worked and notify the office as early as possible if you are unable to work as scheduled.
- **To Seek Assistance:** Ask for help in any situation requiring extra support or special guidance.
- **To Maintain Confidentiality:** Keep all VTRA rider information confidential.
- **To Accept Guidance:** Accept the guidance, feedback, and decisions of the staff and be accountable to them.
- **To Participate in Training:** Participate in training programs and meetings, and continue to learn on the role.
- **To Stay Informed:** Stay informed by reading organizational communications.
- **To Provide Feedback:** Offer feedback and suggestions to staff to improve program effectiveness.
- **To Accept Organizational Decisions:** Accept the organization's right to dismiss any volunteer for poor performance or attendance.
- **To Be Non-Judgmental:** Approach your role without judgment and work with a culturally diverse population, supporting the dignity, integrity, and rights of the people you work with.

VTRA map



VTRA emergency equipment and muster point locations





Connection. Teamwork. Achievement.