



Special Olympics
Florida
Seminole County

Since 1997, C.H.E.E.R. (Circle H Equestrian Event Riders) has represented Seminole County Special Olympics, as the county's equestrian team.

Athletes are paired with a horse and one or two volunteers who assist the athlete in the correct execution of selected tasks. The volunteer is also there as a safety measure in case there is a problem with the horse or rider that would require the volunteer to control the horse or protect the rider. Volunteers also assist with stable management such as cleaning stalls, feeding horses or bathing horses. The equestrian event is the only sport that depends on the cooperation of another living, thinking creature.

Volunteers assist the rider by keeping them focused on the task at hand. Individuals with intellectual disabilities have limited attention span and require consistency and stability. Repetition of tasks is an integral part of the athlete's training. Volunteers walk along with the horse for the 45 minutes to an hour that the lesson lasts. Since this activity takes place outside, we are at the mercy of the elements – heat, cold, wind, rain. Volunteers also assist with show preparation such as bathing and clipping the horse, loading the trailer and cleaning tack. During a show volunteers are needed to assemble athletes to prepare for their class or assist hands on with their competition. After show assistance is also needed such as loading the trailer and cleaning the trailer. Volunteers may also work on our team scrapbook.

Because volunteers can be in short supply, I often have to rely on the help of the athletes' parents to fill in as a volunteer and help with the class. The parents are always willing to do this. I also rely on the parents' support for fundraising, helping transport athletes to and from shows, practicing with the athletes at home, working on our team scrapbook and assisting with the various parties we have during the training season.

It's easy to see the horse makes a connection with the athlete. Horses are understanding and willing to please the rider. It truly is a magical partnership. We have a need for volunteers. Please contact Coach Elise to find out how you can help.

Coach Elise, 407-247-5702 or email Equest9946@aol.com