



Region 9 Conference

June 12-14, 2026

Hosted by:

**Kamloops Therapeutic Riding Association
Kamloops, British Columbia, Canada**



PATH Intl. Region 9 welcomes you to an educational and fun weekend with your friends and colleagues in British Columbia. Your registration fee includes dinner on Friday, light morning refreshments and lunch on Saturday, and light morning refreshments on Sunday.

CONFERENCE LOCATION

Kamloops Therapeutic Riding Association
4155 Shuswap Road
Kamloops, BC V2H 1S8, Canada

LODGING OPTIONS

Rodeway Inn & Suites (31 min. drive)
1200 Rogers Way, Kamloops, BC, V1S 1N5
\$129 CAD + taxes for a room with 2 queen beds
MUST BOOK BY MAY 1! [Book Here](#)

Ranchland Inn (21-min. drive)
2357 Trans-Canada Hwy E, Kamloops, BC V2C 4A8
[Website](#)

DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel Kamloops (29-min. drive)
339 St Paul St, Kamloops, BC V2C 2J5
[Website](#)

Super 8 by Wyndham Kamloops East (21-min. drive)
2459 Trans-Canada Hwy, Kamloops, BC V2C 4A9
[Website](#)

The Plaza Hotel (29-min. drive)
405 Victoria St, Kamloops, BC V2C 2G7
[Website](#)

PATH INTL. REGION 9 CONFERENCE REGISTRATION

Online registration will be available April 3, 2026, through May 26, 2026. After May 26, 2026, registration will need to be completed on-site.

IF YOU ARE A PRESENTER OR CONFERENCE COMMITTEE MEMBER, REMEMBER TO REGISTER WITH YOUR CODE!

Registration April 3, 2026, through May 26, 2026:

Full Conference \$150 USD members \$220 USD non-members

Registration on-site after May 26, 2026:

Full Conference \$210 USD members \$280 USD non-members

Refund Policy:

No refunds due to weather unless the conference is canceled.

A written cancellation request is required for a refund. Email manderson@pathintl.org

Deadline for Full Refund – Request received in PATH Intl. office by **May 26, 2026.**

Deadline for 50% Refund – Request received in PATH Intl. office by **June 13, 2026.**

Individuals who do not submit a written request to PATH Intl. by June 13, 2026, will not receive a refund.

Education:

This conference satisfies up to **10** hours of continuing education requirements.

AGENDA

All times are PST

Friday, June 12, 2026

3 - 4 p.m.

Tour of R2 Equine Rehab Facility **CE**

Includes an information session on equine rehab and descriptions of their programs focused on recovery, wellness and conditioning for all types of equines.

4:30 - 5:30 p.m.

Registration & Welcome

Silent Auction Opens

5 - 5:30 p.m.

Kamloops Therapeutic Riding Association Facility Tour

5:30 - 7:30 p.m.

Dinner & Facilitated Networking

Saturday, June 13, 2026

7:30 – 8:30 a.m.

Registration & Light Refreshments

Session A

8:30 – 10:30 a.m.

A1, Foundations of Sign Language **DE**

This session introduces EAS professionals to foundational sign language concepts with an emphasis on practical application within therapeutic riding environments. Attendees will explore basic sign language etiquette and cultural considerations, a brief history of sign language, and functional signs commonly used during mounted and unmounted activities. Instruction will include the alphabet (fingerspelling), numbers, colors and core arena-specific signs that support rider regulation, choice-making and independence. Through guided practice and scenario-based activities, attendees will gain immediately applicable strategies for integrating sign language into lessons while maintaining safety and consistency across instructional teams.

***Katie Smith** is the program director at Free Rein Therapeutic Riding, a PATH Intl. CTRI®, and an advocate who brings both professional expertise and lived experience to her work. She is hearing-impaired and has firsthand understanding of the communication barriers faced by individuals who are hard of hearing. Through years of work in community-centered environments, Katie emphasizes accessibility, dignity and connection. She shares practical knowledge of sign language to help others understand how communication access impacts participation, independence and belonging.*

10:30 – 10:45 a.m.

BREAK

Session B

10:45 – 11:45 a.m.

B1, The Importance of Equine Topline Health CR All

This presentation examines the functional role of the equine topline and its direct relationship to equine comfort, rider safety and longevity in EAS programs. Emphasis is placed on ethical equine partnership, risk management and horse-centered decision-making. Attendees will explore how topline health supports safe and effective service delivery, contributes to positive rider outcomes, and informs responsible workload management and retirement planning. Practical strategies for conditioning, monitoring, documentation and interdisciplinary collaboration will be discussed to support sustainable equine careers.

Natalie Steilling (she/her) is a COTA/L, CTRS and PATH Intl. CTRI® with over a decade of experience supporting children and adults with developmental and physical disabilities in clinical and EAS settings. She specializes in pediatric occupational therapy services and has served in instructional and program development roles at PATH Intl. centers. She is currently the equine manager at Free Rein Therapeutic Riding in Spokane, WA.

B2, Getting the Most Out of the Executive Director & Board Partnership CE

The nonprofit executive director and board relationship may be what gets a center through the tough times or what keeps folks up at night. Some nonprofit chief executives must establish a working partnership with new board presidents every two years if not every year. The dynamics are constantly changing. This session will provide tips and tools for creating productive partnerships with your board leadership, with an emphasis on how to prevent friction through roles, responsibilities and communication clarity.

Patricia McCowan works with not-for-profit executives and boards seeking opportunities for alignment, engagement and growth. She specializes in purpose-driven leadership, productive board-executive partnerships, success planning and leadership continuity. Pat has more than 30 years of work in the EAS and not-for-profit sectors, a Master of Nonprofit Leadership (MNPL), and a BoardSource Certificate of Nonprofit Board Consulting. She is a PATH Intl. ATRI, CTRI and ESMHL, and is PATH Intl. standards course faculty and lead site visitor.

11:45 a.m. - 1:45 p.m.

Lunch with the PATH Intl. Update, Field Test Standards Update and Region 9 Meeting

Lunch option to be chosen at registration:

- 1) Greek Chicken (GF) - Lemon herb chicken breast, baby spinach, roasted yellow potatoes, tomato, cucumber, bell pepper, pickled red onion, tzatziki, and hummus.
- 2) Sweet Chili Hoisin Tofu (Vegetarian) - Diced tofu, soba noodles, edamame, carrots, cabbage, cucumber, crushed peanuts, cilantro, sweet chili hoisin sauce, sesame seeds, and green onion.
- 3) Chipotle Yam (Vegan/ GF) - Roasted yams, kale, roasted corn and black bean salad, avocado, spiced lime vinaigrette.
- 4) BBQ Chicken Bowl - Sweet and sticky BBQ chicken, mixed greens, shredded cheddar, roasted corn, tomatoes, cucumber, tortilla strips, peppercorn ranch.

Session C

1:45 – 3:45 p.m.

C1, Volunteer Training: Don't Do the Horse's Job CE

Volunteer engagement is essential to safe and effective EAS, yet well-intentioned volunteers can inadvertently override a horse's natural responses, increasing stress and risk to both equines and participants. This presentation will outline a structured volunteer training model from a PATH Intl. Member Center that prioritizes program equine welfare while building volunteer confidence and competence. Attendees will learn how to teach volunteers to support riders without doing the horse's job, recognize equine communication and stress cues, and apply hands-on training strategies that enhance volunteer effectiveness and horse wellbeing.

Ashley Sudds (she/her) is a PATH Intl. CTRI®, a CanTRA B1 and a Canadian-licensed coach in equestrian sports. She has been with Kamloops Therapeutic Riding Association since 2014 and currently serves as the executive director. Ashley has extensive experience in volunteer training and EAS, with a focus on horse welfare and participant safety. She has also coached para-dressage athletes at two BC Summer Games, bringing expertise in adaptive equestrian instruction and inclusive programming to her work.

3:45 – 4 p.m.

BREAK

Session D

4 – 5 p.m.

D1, Strategic Planning for Success CE

Strategic planning is the cornerstone of success for any business. Planning for a nonprofit's future can seem overwhelming, especially if the organization is in survival mode. However, thoughtful analysis of the organization's current reality, effort to define a shared vision of the future, clear group goal setting, and a plan to implement and adapt the vision and goals can create a path forward that speaks to funders, staff members and other stakeholders. Learn methods that have worked for three organizations that have experienced both successful and less than ideal strategic planning within the world of EAS. Attendees will get a framework for each section of strategic planning to take home and share with their organization.

Amber Varner founded *Forward Stride* in 2003 and is a PATH Intl. CTRI® and ESMHL. She has had many job roles and experience as head instructor, program director and associate executive director. Now, as the executive director, Amber works towards executing the board's vision of a vibrant, innovative and sustainable future for *Forward Stride*.

Paula Del Guidice has been the executive director of the *Little Bit Therapeutic Riding Center* for over eight years. She has served as executive director or regional director for three other nonprofit organizations in the Seattle area since 2002. In addition, she has served on the board of directors of several religious, arts, environmental and community service nonprofits starting in her early 20s. In 1999, she was elected by representatives from throughout the country to serve as the first woman chair of the board in the *National Wildlife Federation's* 63-year history. She is past president of the *Rotary Club of Redmond*, president of the *Rotary Club of Redmond Foundation* and assistant governor of *Rotary District 5030*. She is a new member of the PATH Intl. Board of Trustees and sits on the finance committee. She has a bachelor's in business administration from the *University of Nevada* and a master's from *Regis University* in Denver.

Polly Cohen is the executive director of *Healing Reins Equine Assisted Services* in central Oregon, bringing over 23 years of experience in EAS. She has served in multiple leadership roles within PATH Intl., including Oregon state chair, region representative and currently as the *Membership Outreach Committee chair*. Polly leads inclusive, high-quality EAS services and programs with a strong focus on standards, access and long-term sustainability.

D2, Equine Enrichment, Fitness and EAL CR All

This session explores ground-based activities that promote connection, equine enrichment, independence and shared learning between participants, equine partners, the volunteer team and one another. The session will cover how groundwork supports equine fitness and enrichment as well as promoting confidence, engagement and independence amongst our participants. Central to this work is allowing the dignity of risk. Rather than intervention, participants are coached through challenges, helping to build skills to enhance independence, problem-solving, resiliency and providing a sense of empowerment. Strategies for keeping activities engaging and supporting independent leading will be discussed. Attendees will gain practical strategies for creating safe, engaging groundwork experiences that foster confidence, connection and mutual trust.

Nuan Crowder started her lifelong journey with horses in the early 1970s at the *Woodland Park Zoo* in Seattle where she helped care for and lead pony ride horses. She was introduced to EAS in the late 1980s through *Little Bit Therapeutic Riding Center* in Woodinville, WA, where she witnessed firsthand the powerful impact of EAS. Nuan volunteered internationally with *RDA Hong Kong*, working with off-track Thoroughbreds at the *Royal Hong Kong Jockey Club*. Since 2018, she has been a dedicated volunteer with *Healing Reins* and is a PATH Intl. CTRI®. In 2024, she became a first-time horse owner, further deepening her hands-on horsemanship experience and strengthening her commitment to adaptive riding.

5:30 p.m.

Silent Auction Closes

6 p.m.

Silent Auction Pickup

Dinner on your own (scroll down to see some great options!)

Sunday, June 14, 2026

8 - 8:30 a.m.

**Light Refreshments
Silent Auction Pickup**

Session E

8:30 – 9:30 a.m.

E1, Sustaining the Equine Partner for Readiness, Balance and Longevity CR All

This session outlines the Together In Stride (TIS) approach to preparing and supporting equine partners for safe, sustainable participation in EAS, implemented across three locations with three distinct herds and a range of EAS offerings. This model integrates structured readiness assessments, workload balance practices and proactive wellness protocols designed to promote long-term equine well-being. Attendees will learn key indicators used to assess horse readiness and capacity, practical strategies for maintaining physical, emotional and workload balance, and operational procedures that strengthen safety, longevity and ethical stewardship of equine partners within diverse EAS program settings.

Tammera Merkens (she/ her) is a social worker with over 20 years of experience in mental health, a Certified EAL Facilitator with Cartier Farms, and holds a PATH Intl. EAL Program Completion Certificate. She is co-founder and executive director of Together In Stride, where she leads programs across three locations and multiple herds, integrating EAS and Animal-Assisted Activities while prioritizing ethical stewardship to ensure horse safety, balance and longevity. Tammera also owns and operates Humble Hooves on Vancouver Island and is dedicated to lifelong learning, reconciliation and creating safe, inclusive and impactful programs for both humans and equine partners.

Johanna Tilly (she/her) has over 20 years of experience working with horses and is a Certified EAL Facilitator with Cartier Farms. She serves as horse coordinator across all three Together In Stride locations, where she is solely responsible for creating and maintaining systems that support the health, readiness and well-being of horses. A lifelong horse enthusiast, Johanna is deeply passionate about fostering the physical, emotional and long-term welfare of every equine partner. She is dedicated to continually learning and improving each day to advocate for and enhance horse welfare, ensuring all equine partners are safe, balanced, and prepared to participate in meaningful human-horse interactions.

9:30 – 9:45 a.m.

BREAK

Session F

9:45 – 10:45 a.m.

F1, Understanding Autism and EAS DE

This session will provide an overview of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) within the context of EAS, emphasizing current terminology and the practical application of support strategies across the levels of autism. Attendees will gain an understanding of autism as a neurodevelopmental condition characterized by individual variability, rather than a fixed set of abilities or limitations. The session reviews DSM-5-TR autism support levels and clarifies how these levels describe support needs rather than functioning. Using a strengths-based framework aligned with PATH Intl. standards, attendees will learn to identify and implement appropriate accommodation and instructional strategies in EAS to promote safety, inclusion and meaningful participation. Attendees will be better equipped to use accurate autism terminology, recognize individual differences among autistic participants, and apply effective supports within EAS.

Natalie Steilling see bio in session B1.

10:45 - 11 a.m.

BREAK

Session G

11 a.m. - 12 p.m.

G1, Use Salesforce to Manage Equine Expenses CE

If your center uses Salesforce of any flavor (NPSP, Equiforce, LitNim, etc.), learn how to track your equine expenses per animal without buying anything new. Attendees will learn how to set up expense categories, enter each expense and allocate the expense to multiple categories and to individual equines. Learn how to run reports that show quarterly and annual costs per animal and compare those costs to equine-utilization. Learn how to use Quickbooks online reports and a little AI to create an expense upload into Salesforce. Links and instructions will be provided for all attendees.

Teri Walker is the founder and CEO of CommonTeri Services. In 2014, Teri combined her experience in technology with her experience in nonprofit management to found CommonTeri Services to help nonprofits that use Salesforce. She and her team care for people by using systems and data, with a passion for serving nonprofits that deliver direct services like EAS. Teri has 17 years of experience in designing Salesforce solutions for nonprofits and has multiple certifications in Salesforce and Agile project management. CommonTeri first became a PATH Intl. sponsor in 2019.

G2, Consent-Based Approaches in Therapeutic Riding CE

Physical assistance is often necessary in therapeutic riding to support safety, postural alignment and skill development. Programs frequently serve individuals with diverse disabilities raising important ethical questions and practical challenges related to consent for physical touch. This session examines evidence-based approaches to obtaining and maintaining consent for touch in therapeutic riding across different disability groups, with the aim of fostering safe, respectful and comfortable environments for all involved. Drawing on professional standards from EAS organizations, trauma-informed care principles, and disability rights frameworks, consent is conceptualized as an ongoing, relational process rather than a single administrative event. Learn how consent practices must be adapted to individual communication abilities, cognitive capacities and sensory needs, and that the right to refuse or withdraw consent at any point is central to ethical practice. Evidence suggests that consent-based touch enhances trust, engagement and therapeutic outcomes while reducing the risk of harm.

Gabriella Renuncio Bodanese holds a bachelor's degree in psychology with specialization in high-complexity care. She is currently finishing her master's degree in gerontology at Simon Fraser University, where her work focuses on aging, health and well-being. Gabriella is pursuing her PATH Intl. CTRI® to combine her background in psychology with equine-assisted services to support inclusive and ethical practice.

Grace Abbot got her start in the horse world thanks to the support of therapeutic riding. She went on to have extensive involvement working with horses, including going through Pony Club, working in barns and riding many different disciplines. She then came back into therapeutic riding as an instructor to share the healing power of horses with others as a CanTRA BI. She is currently finishing up her bachelor's degree in kinesiology at the University of the Fraser Valley and is passionate about bringing evidence-based practices into her teaching to best support her riders.

We look forward to seeing you soon in British Columbia!

Traveling to Kamloops

A few travel tips to know:

To enter Canada, U.S. citizens must present one of the following:

- Valid U.S. Passport (recommended)
- Enhanced Driver's License (EDL) – available in certain states (Note: A U.S. driver's license alone is insufficient for entry.)
- U.S. Passport Card
- NEXUS Card (for expedited travel)

Entry by Land

- **Ensure your vehicle has valid registration and insurance documents.**
- **Primary Crossing Points: Kamloops is accessible via several border crossings. The most common entry points are:**
 - Sumas Border Crossing (SR 9)
 - Osoyoos Border Crossing (BC-97)
 - Cranbrook Border Crossing (BC-93/95)
 - Nelway Border Crossing (BC-6)

Airports

- Vancouver International Airport (YVR) - 4hr 6min drive to KTRA
 - Bus from YVR to Kamloops on [EBus](#) or [Rider Express](#)
- Abbotsford International Airport (YXX) - 3hr 9min drive to KTRA
- Kamloops Airport (YKA) - 40min drive to KTRA

Things to Do in the Kamloops Area

For more information, [click here](#).

Places of Interest/ Activities

[Riverside Park Beach](#)

Situated in the heart of Kamloops, this popular beach boasts a sandy shoreline along the South Thompson River and a large splash park above it. It's an ideal spot for sunbathing, picnicking, and relaxing.

[BC Wildlife Park](#)

The BC Wildlife Park is a nonprofit organization and registered charity located in Kamloops, British Columbia, since 1965. The BC Wildlife Park is home to nearly 200 animals and 65 different species that are native to British Columbia, including cougars, bears, wolves, reptiles, birds of prey and the only Kermode bear in human care in the world.

[The Kamloops Bike Ranch](#)

Shred the trails at the Kamloops Bike Ranch to get your adrenaline fix in the birthplace of freeride mountain biking. Known as "The Ranch," this iconic spot boasts professionally crafted jump lines that have been featured in numerous freeride mountain biking films. As Canada's largest municipal bike park, The Ranch is a great destination to catch some air. From small jumps to massive booters, The Ranch caters to all skill levels.

Kamloops is renowned for its unique desert landscape and sprawling hills. Discover its beauty on our [endless hiking trails](#) through rolling grasslands, vast canyons, and towering hoodoos. Known for our iconic hoodoos, Kamloops has [three unique hoodoo hikes](#) to see these ancient formations in all their glory. For a more dynamic trail through forests to mountain-top views, mark [hiking Battle Bluff](#) as a must-do on the adventure list. If chasing sunsets is more your vibe, the city also has [the ultimate viewpoints](#) to snap those Instagrammable moments.

Food

Inspired by the food halls of the world, [Yew Street Food Hall](#) brings together a unique mix of locally-owned restaurants under one roof. Here, you can sample dishes from Lemongrass Vietnamese Restaurant, The Greek Kouzina, Tong Dak Korean Fried Chicken, Taco Alley, Smashville Burger Bar, Breaktime Indian Street Food, Inferno Pizza Co., Brews on Yew, and Bubble Time Tea & Waffles. This food hall is perfect for those who want to experience a variety of flavours (or have diners with different palates!).

For a regional dining experience, [Cordo Resto + Bar](#) offers innovative and nutritious dishes inspired by the region, while [Brownstone Restaurant](#), set in a century-old heritage building, serves dishes crafted from the freshest seasonal ingredients. If you're craving traditional Italian cuisine, [Peter's Pasta](#) brings the made-fresh taste of Italy to downtown Kamloops.

Wineries, Cideries, Breweries & Distilleries

For those craving a cold brew, [The Noble Pig's](#) inviting patio serves up innovative craft beer, living up to their hype as Kamloops' first microbrewery. Other local breweries include [Red Collar Brewing Co.](#), [Embers Brewhouse](#), [Iron Road Brewing](#), and [Bright Eye Brewing](#).

[Monte Creek Winery](#) captivates with its breathtaking tasting room views, iconic bell tower, and scenic outdoor dining. While [Privato Vineyard and Winery](#) offers a cozy, welcoming atmosphere on its sprawling 80-acre farm, complete with a sun-soaked patio, blooming garden, and family-owned cidery [Woodward Cider Co.](#) Meanwhile, [Sagewood Winery](#) is celebrated for its acclaimed wines and intimate tasting experience as a family-run boutique winery.

[Red Bridge Distilling](#) is where traditional craftsmanship meets innovation, with a range spanning from aromatic gins to smooth-as-silk vodkas. Named after the distinctive Kamloops landmark, this is where you'll find creative, hand-crafted BC spirits that are sure to spice up any night! Downtown at [Gin Lane Distilling Co.](#) – within Red Collar Brewing – gin enthusiasts can savour uniquely crafted cocktails and find the famous Aquarius New Age Gin. For a distinct local flavour, try the Borealis Haskap Gin, featuring BC haskap berries.

Map of Kamloops

[Click here](#) for a map with suggested accommodations, attractions, activities, food, drink, and more!

