



When I tell people I volunteer at Helping Hands Healing Hooves, a horse farm that works with clients of all varying disabilities, I get a lot of strange looks. People assume we are doing “pony rides” and cannot understand why the clients would benefit from this program. I get so excited every time I have the chance to explain the wonderful changes I see in the clients. It is not just horseback riding for them. They connect with their horse and feel a responsibility for brushing, saddling and leading them around the arena. We see smiles from normally stoic faces, improved posture and an overwhelming sense of pride and love.

The clients are also putting in a surprising amount of work. Along with brushing and carrying the tack, they also have to steer, follow directions, focus and most importantly stay in the middle! The horses movement causes the clients to work on maintaining balance; engaging their entire core with every step. We also have the clients stretch to improve range of motion with cleverly disguised moves: reach for the horses tail, reach for the ears, helicopter, climb the ladder and many more.

We have clients who touch your heart and make you laugh. We have a wonderful little guy who is so excited when he gets to the barn all he can do is cry until he gets on the mounting block. Once on the saddle his tears dry up, he sits up straight and gently tells his horse to “go.” You can see his overstimulated brain relax as the horses smooth movements carry him away. He has recently started to look at the mirrors we have along the wall. We sometimes catch him making faces and sticking out his tongue at the cute kid on the horse.

Some clients present a little challenge but make the job so rewarding. We have a client who came to his first summer lesson being carried. He couldn't walk very far because his crutches slowed him down and it was faster for him to crawl. He was a very energetic young boy who needed constant reminders to face the task at hand. He was slowly making progress and getting stronger every time he rode. When I helped with his lesson in the fall, he showed up with no crutches and still full of energy. He knew he would need to get some energy out so he asked if he could run in the indoor arena. I watched, totally astonished, as this young boy wobbly ran around the arena. He fell occasionally but each time jumped right back up and kept running. He is a wonderful example of why I love to volunteer there.

I started to volunteer at the farm for totally selfish reasons. I work in a high stress job and thought being around horses would help me. I didn't really think much of the clients and was just looking for my own stress relief. In the first day I could see the positive impact this program made for the clients. It truly feels like magic to talk to the parents and caregivers about how the program helps with strength, attitude, range of motion and focus. I never thought I would share such joy, friendship and closeness with the other volunteers, staff and clients. I never thought I

could understand the nonverbal clients, but now I can clearly tell you how excited she is about matching colors, the cats, and picking out her saddle. Helping Hands makes a positive impact not just on the clients. I feel happy and stress-free every time I show up. When I am having a hard week at work I can just tell myself "Thursday is coming!" and all the worries melt away. I even planned my wedding around the Helping Hands Barn Dance so I could still help in full force. This program and family has quickly become a staple in my life and I am thankful every week for Helping Hands.

Helping Hands does all it can to keep the cost down to a minimum. We rely on volunteers for most lessons, extra projects and fund raising. Helping Hands has a scholarship program so we can still assist families with limited income. Helping Hands is in a losing game, they charge less than cost for putting someone in the saddle. We have been fortunate with our fund-raising including hosting a barn dance, golf outing and horse show but we cannot continue without help. We have donation programs to sponsor one of our wonderful horses, give to a scholarship or supplies for the horses. We appreciate all support and want to thank everyone who helps to maintain this wonderful program...Sarah

A simple dream, a dash of hope, a touch of faith, endless possibilities.

1971 Granville Road Cedarburg, WI 53012 262-689-5677
www.helpinghandshealinghooves.org