



RIDE WITH PRIDE: A Farm Full of Opportunities

July 6, 2023 — GUYSVILLE, Ohio — As summer is now in full swing, so is the annual Easterseals Ride With Pride program. Beginning in 2018, this marks the sixth year of free, equine-based therapy and care for Easterseals clients provided by Easterseals in partnership with Dutch Pines Equine.

During sessions, each client receives an hour of one-on-one training. This training includes tasks both on and off of the horse.

Off the horse, children get to practice simple barn chores such as feeding and bringing water to the horses. On the horse, however, is where the children are truly immersed in unique, hands-on, transformative therapy.

With the guidance and support of three trained and certified equine therapists, children are able to do stretches, play games and participate in activities and exercises all while riding the horses.

Twenty children participated in this year's Ride With Pride program. Each one was provided with exercises used to strengthen them physically, mentally and emotionally as they grew stronger, smarter and more confident on the horse they were riding.

At Ride With Pride, children often do exercises to enhance memory skills, such as learning a cheer from the therapists and then repeating it on their own, or memorizing a rhythm the therapist claps out and mimicking it. Jillian Hanes, 13, of Waterford, has been working specifically on memory and physical movement during her sessions.



This is Jillian's fourth year participating in Ride With Pride. Easterseals occupational therapist Mary Lee Kelly of Guysville said Jillian is strong enough to be a barrel rider, as she has gained the strength and knows how to use her legs to direct the horse.

The therapy certainly aims to impact physical abilities, but it also assists clients in facing mental challenges. The first time Jillian saw chickens, she was frightened. Now, Jillian loves chickens and was wearing a smile the entire time she was feeding and holding one of the blind chickens at Dutch Pines.

One major reason Ride With Pride is so special is it provides kids who receive occupational and physical therapy through Easterseals to be exposed to an activity they may have never been able to do before, while at the same time growing, receiving treatment and having fun.

Audri Lenox, 7, of Belpre, Ohio, said during her session-ending trot around the arena: "This is the best day ever!"

Jason Cockerham of Belpre said daughter Jaci, 3, loves it so much that if someone cancels, they bring Jaci to get extra time on the horse.

Kelly and Easterseals physical therapist Shawn Jones of Vienna work hard to make Ride With Pride both fun and productive for the children.

Kelly, Jones and Dutch Pines co-owner Jessie Quinlan of Guysville all received certification in hippotherapy, formerly called equine-assisted therapy, through West Virginia University at On Eagles' Wings training center in Fairmont.

The hard work pays off, as the children receive a therapeutic, fun-filled opportunity they may have never had without the dedication of Easterseals Rehabilitation Center. The program is funded annually by the Donald Morris Charitable Trust.

Founded in 1937 in Wheeling, Easterseals Rehabilitation Center also has offices in Parkersburg, New Martinsville and Steubenville, Ohio. Its mission is to create solutions that change the lives of children and adults with disabilities and their families. For more information, visit www.easterseals.com/wv and follow Easterseals on Facebook.

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