

Unbridled Hope

Saddle Up - Max

By Connor Samples

Individualized therapeutic riding lessons for those with special needs or special circumstances.

Every student that comes to The Red Barn brings with them their own unique ability that drives them towards self-improvement. Sometimes it comes in a more subtle form, a quiet courage within the child that refuses to accept defeat. At other times the child's trait will roar, a bursting confidence that can tackle any obstacle headlong.

I was first introduced to Max this past September on a chilly, overcast Sunday afternoon. To understand what made this lesson and what makes Max so remarkable, there needs to be an understanding of Max's circumstance. He has Cerebral Palsy and is in a wheelchair. He is also a very bright child and an even harder worker, as I discovered during that lesson.

We had Dakota tacked and ready when Max arrived and led Dakota out to the mounting ramp where Max would meet us. Danielle helped mount him and the lesson was underway. Dakota has since retired, but any of our volunteers or staff who worked with him will tell you that for a 30 year old horse, he has some serious pep in his step. This speed, mixed with Dakota's natural movement of his hips as he walks makes it so the rider has to use their leg and core muscles to their fullest in order to stay balanced.

We walked around the barn before travelling down the driveway

at a brisk walk. Honestly, I was struggling to keep pace myself, and by the time we got to the end of the driveway my shoulder was starting to get sore from maintaining a thigh hold on Max. However, as I was mentally trying to overcome my own discomfort, I looked up at Max. He appeared winded; I knew his muscles had to have been straining to maintain his balance. But more than anything, I remember his eyes. Max kept looking forward, his eyes never straying from the horizon with a determination and a laser-like focus guiding him forward. In that moment, Max sat taller than any other rider I have ever seen.

We walked back up the driveway before going down it again and then looping around the upper barn and outdoor arena. All in all, the ride itself lasted over thirty minutes. I know I felt more physically exhausted after that lesson than any other lesson I have been a part of, so I can't even begin to imagine how tired Max must have been. But not once did he complain or ask for a break. That is what makes Max so unique. In just one lesson, I saw his determination and courage quietly lead him forward while at the same time calling out, inspiring me to push myself to work harder. I hope I have the opportunity to work with Max again, not only to see his continued growth but so that I might again find inspiration for growth in my own journey through life.



1,623

**SADDLE
UP
LESSONS**

IN 2015



Horse Play - Misty Camp

Camps, classes, and other recreational/educational activities offered both to children with disabilities and their typically developing peers. Horse Play serves individuals, as well as groups from other non-profit agencies and local schools.

Last year we were contacted by Mrs. Reed, a 3rd grade teacher at the Westminster School at Oak Mountain. Every year, the 3rd grade at Westminster reads Marguerite Henry's classic children's book, *Misty of Chincoteague*, the story of a brother and sister who work together to purchase and train a wild pony from the island of Assateague. Besides being a great story, the book has a lot of good vocabulary words for kids - and a lot of those words are horse related! So, Mrs. Reed had the idea that if the kids were able to visit a real barn on their field trip and really learn what it meant to muck a stall or clean a bridle then their experience reading *Misty of Chincoteague* would be even more meaningful.



So, for 3 days in a row (one for each class) we had a group of sixteen 3rd graders out to the barn. The kids worked through four different stations: grooming and learning the parts of the horse; doing barn chores; an arts and crafts project to learn colors and markings; and cleaning tack, with a special surprise at the end - meeting our very own Chincoteague pony, just like Misty! Our Chincoteague, Salty, was born wild on an island and swum across when he was only a few months old. We didn't tell the students (or teachers!) that they'd get to meet a "real-life Misty," and the looks on their faces when they found out was probably the best part of the camp.

The lead teacher later wrote us and said, "You and your staff really did an outstanding job! We really thought it was a huge benefit for our children in preparing them for our story, *Misty of Chincoteague*. You did a marvelous job working with them; your staff were so patient and "kid-friendly." I know that many parents would have been surprised to learn that scooping-poop during "chores" was one of their favorite activities. We enjoyed learning how to groom the horse and thought the shaving cream vocabulary stick-ons was a creative and fun way to learn the parts of the horse. Meeting an actual Chincoteague pony, Salty, was just the icing on the cake! We are definitely planning on coming back next year if that works for you."

734

**HORSE PLAY
SESSIONS**
IN 2015

125

**SESSIONS HELPING
OUR VETERANS**
IN 2015



Take the Reins

By Virginia Powell and Kyle Hicks

The Red Barn's Take the Reins program serves veterans and active military personnel and their families.

I've been working with Kyle as his life coach since October of 2014. Kyle is a former army soldier who suffered a Traumatic Brain Injury a few years back. I arranged for Kyle to get involved at The Red Barn because I knew of the services they provided there from when I visited along with the Lakeshore Foundation's Lima Foxtrot program. Because of The Red Barn's Take the Reins program, Kyle and I are able to come to the barn once a week and assist with barn chores and learn about horses.

The Take the Reins program is providing Kyle with pre-requisite skills like following multi-step directions, problem solving, and locating items in a new environment. Since we started at the barn, I've seen Kyle improve his ability to follow multi-step directions so much that he can complete some barn chores independently. He has increased his problem solving skills through things like learning how to hang the feed buckets and wrapping the water hose around its holder. He has also worked on recognizing personal space, learning horse colors and markings, and reading horse and human emotions.

Kyle wrote the following about his experience at The Red Barn:

"Working with the staff at The Red Barn is nice and rewarding because through mucking the stalls and giving the horses food and water it gives them a good environment to live within. I feel very privileged to have worked alongside Wyspr and Kyle. It has taught me how to look past what shortcomings someone might have and do my best to try and accomplish the goal despite what shortcomings that may be. I might be a little bit bias [sic] because I am talking about myself but I think I have made vast improvements since I began there."

To make an appointment to visit The Red Barn, call (205) 699-8204

Training - Karen Evans

Workshops and continuing education for our staff, volunteers, and similar agencies across the United States.

Knowing my love of horses, my friends Jeff Morrison and Debbie Prewitt suggested that I look into volunteering at The Red Barn. When my husband and I came to an event at The Red Barn one rainy Sunday afternoon, I knew that was where I needed and



wanted to be! I have loved horses as long as I can remember and am blessed to have 6 of my own. I have also always loved serving in some way. The Red Barn was a good match, a new opportunity for God to use me.

After going through volunteer orientation, I started working as a sidewalker. After a few lessons, the instructor I was working with encouraged me to look into going through the training to become a certified therapeutic riding instructor. I really didn't even seriously consider

it, thinking it could never be a reality for me. When she suggested that I become an instructor, I saw years of college before me. Without telling you my age, I will tell you that I have been married 39 years and have 3 boys who have 7 children between them with another on the way in May. So you know what that makes me - a grandmother. So years of college was beyond anything I could imagine doing! But then I learned about the process and how they would walk me through it each step of the way. Before I knew what was happening, I was on board. At times, I still wonder if this will ever be a reality for me. But I know that if it's in God's plan for me to become an instructor, it will happen.

In the meantime, I'm enjoying being with everyone at The Red Barn. I don't know who I've learned more from - the students, who never give up no matter what the disability or trauma they are living with, or everyone that works and volunteers there! God is using them all in my life.

One of my first students, Lily, I worked with was so shy and timid that she would barely speak to anyone. But she loved coming to the barn and loved her horse, PJ. By the end of the session, she was beginning to say a few more things. When I saw her at Bluegrass and Burgers my granddaughter, McCaylan, waved out the window at her. I asked McCaylan how she knew Lily and she told me that she had played with her while we were at the event. When I asked McCaylan if Lily had talked to her, she looked at me like I was crazy. They had talked and played all afternoon. Then she said, "I think I'm going to be a riding instructor when I grow up!" Through the eyes of a child, life is so simple! Once again, I knew that God had me right where He wants me!

1,855

**HOURS OF
TRAINING**
IN 2015

8,879

**VOLUNTEER
HOURS SERVED**

IN 2015

Volunteer Perspectives

Becky Shuler

I heard about The Red Barn through a friend of mine, who is a longtime friend of Joy O'Neal. My friend had been telling me about The Red Barn, but we had not yet gotten together to go see it for ourselves. When she received an invitation to their annual Christmas party she asked if I wanted to attend it with her. It was a very cold December day, but everyone we saw had a big smile on their face.

As with most horse people, horses are a lifelong love for me. Coming to The Red Barn has allowed me to share my experience with and love for horses with others, including those with special needs. I have had the opportunity to work with several different instructors during my time at the barn and they really have a gift for knowing what the students and the volunteers need during the lessons. Seeing how the students light up when they interact with the horses just lifts my spirits.

I am fortunate enough to have a spouse that loves the outdoors too, so he has started volunteering at the barn. We've had fun working together at some of the fundraisers over the past year and really like seeing how the community comes together to support such a wonderful place. He has developed a new skill set since he's been volunteering here, and I have been working on mine too - mucking stalls. It is truly a labor of love.



TOURS

2nd Thursday of each month at 6:00 p.m.

3rd Saturday of each month at 10:00 a.m.

4th Tuesday of each month at 10:00 a.m.

The Red Barn is a 501(c)(3) organization, and all donations are tax-deductible.

Donate online:

www.TheRedBarn.org

Mail donations to:

The Red Barn

2700 Bailey Road

Leeds, Alabama 35094



2700 BAILEY ROAD
LEEDS, AL 35094

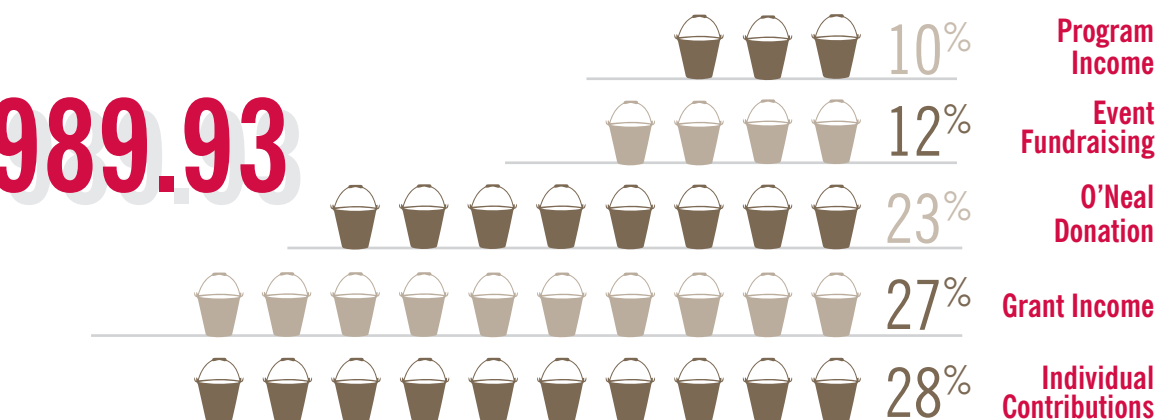


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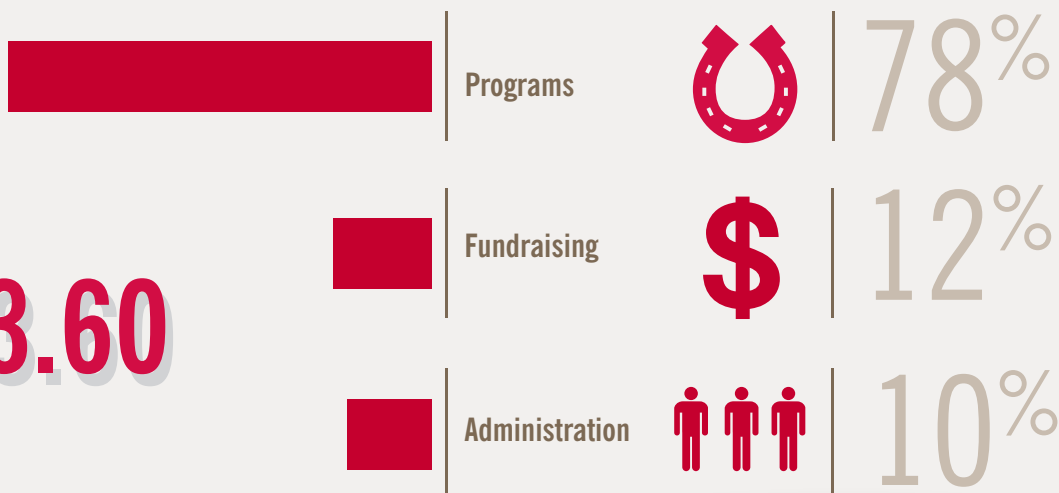
INCOME

\$544,989.93



EXPENSES

\$567,623.60



Our expenses are well within the guidelines of The Better Business Bureau's Standards for Charity Accountability and the NonProfit Sector's Principles for Good Governance and Ethical Practice guidelines that an agency should spend at least 65% of total income on program expenses.