



## 2023 PROGRAM EVALUATION

By Connor Samples



### 2023 Overview

We went into 2023 with the goal of being more effective and efficient. So, we are proud to say that we produced significantly more program hours in 2023 compared to 2022, particularly in our equine-assisted learning program.

Many of the issues we faced in 2022 lingered. Inflation is still a challenge, especially since the cost of many horse-related items like feed, hay, and shavings has exorbitantly increased over the past few years. We still do not have a designated retirement center for our aging horses.

Additionally, we experienced staff turnover in 2023. Two of our riding instructors had to leave in the first half of the year, leaving us with only four instructors. We've since started training a new instructor through our registered apprenticeship program, but the reduced number of riding instructors did inhibit some of what we could do in our riding program in 2023.

We are excited to announce that the registered therapeutic riding instructor apprenticeship we started in 2022 has now been rolled out on a national level. You can read more information about it on [our website](#).

The end of the federally mandated COVID-19 public health emergency in May 2023 opened opportunities for us to partner with groups we rarely were able to serve during the pandemic. We saw the return of more school field trips, and we plan to continue to regularly serve schools and other organizations as we proceed into 2024.

### **Terminology**

The Red Barn is accredited by several organizations. These include the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship (PATH), the Federation of Horses in Education and Therapy International (HETI), and the International Association of Human-Animal Interaction Organization (IAHAIO).

Industry leaders issued some guidelines in December 2020 so that terminology would be consistent across the entire equine-assisted services industry. The term “therapeutic riding” had sometimes been confused with “therapy,” causing some families to believe their riding lessons were mental health or physical therapy on horseback.

The new terminology uses the umbrella term equine-assisted services and divides them into three broad categories: horsemanship, learning, and therapy, with different activities in each.

# Equine Assisted Services (EAS)

In December of 2020, industry leaders created a unifying language for equine-related activities in order to minimize confusion regarding services. Equine Assisted Services are split into three categories explained below: Horsemanship, Therapy, and Learning.



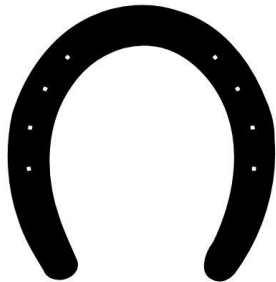
## Horsemanship

Adaptive equestrian sports  
Adaptive riding or therapeutic riding  
Driving  
Interactive vaulting



## Therapy

Counseling  
Occupational Therapy  
Physical Therapy  
Psychotherapy  
Speech-language Pathology



## Learning

Equine-assisted learning in education  
Equine-assisted learning in organizations  
Equine-assisted learning in personal development

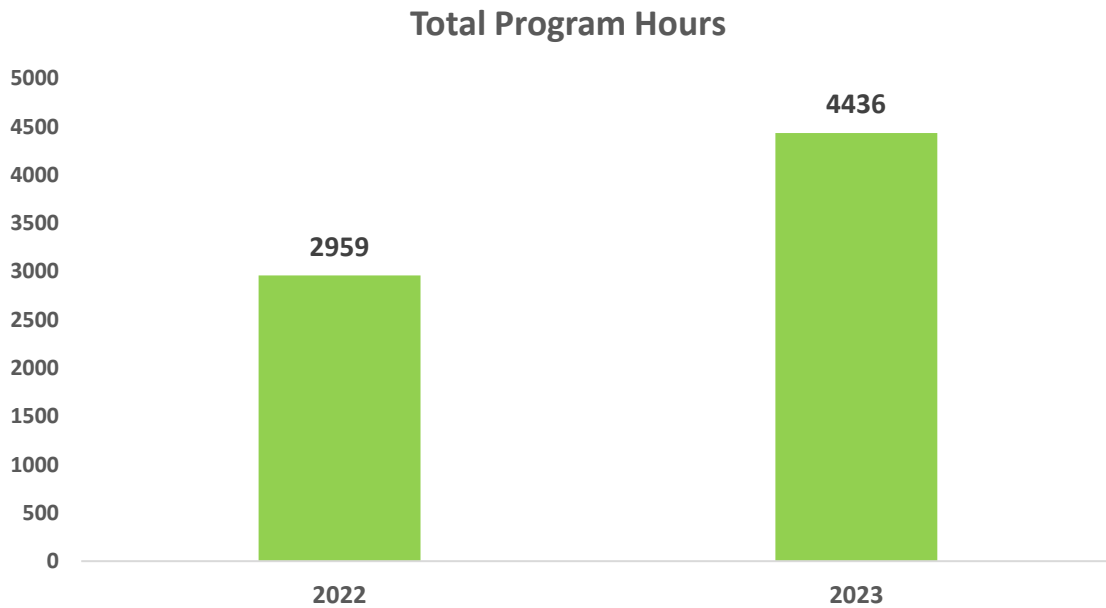


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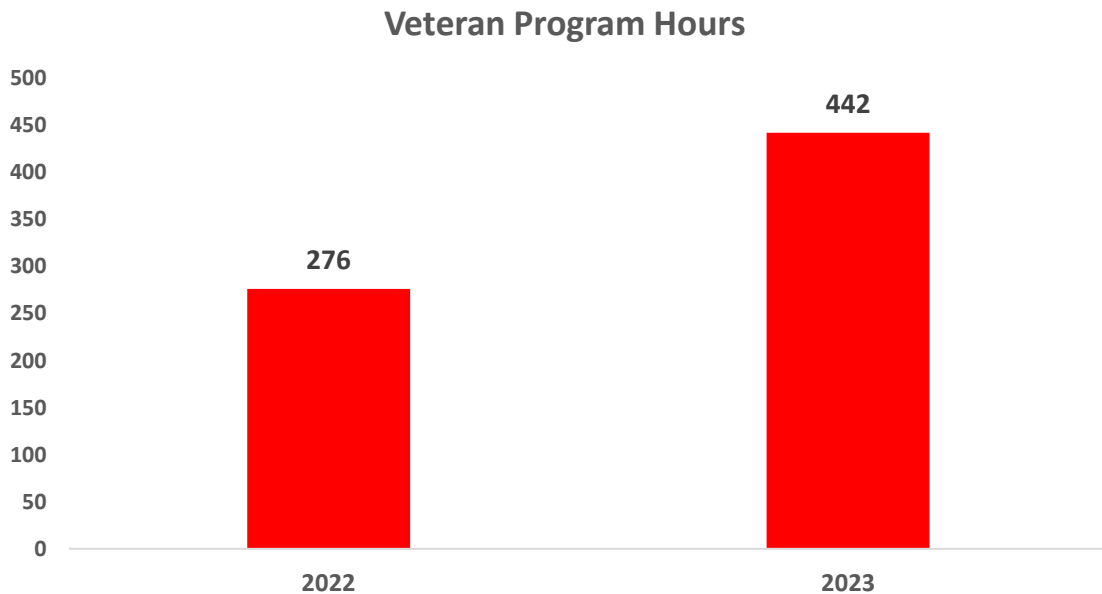
Faith, Hope & Love

In order to be aligned with our industry's new terminology, we reclassified our programs into these broad categories. More specific information can be found in the article *Optimal Terminology for Services in the United States That Incorporate Horses to Benefit People: A Consensus Document* by Wendy Wood, Kathy Alm, Joann Benjamin, Lynn Thomas, Debbie Anderson, Lissa Pohl, and Michele Kane.

## Program Evaluation - Total Hours, Veteran Hours, Volunteer Hours

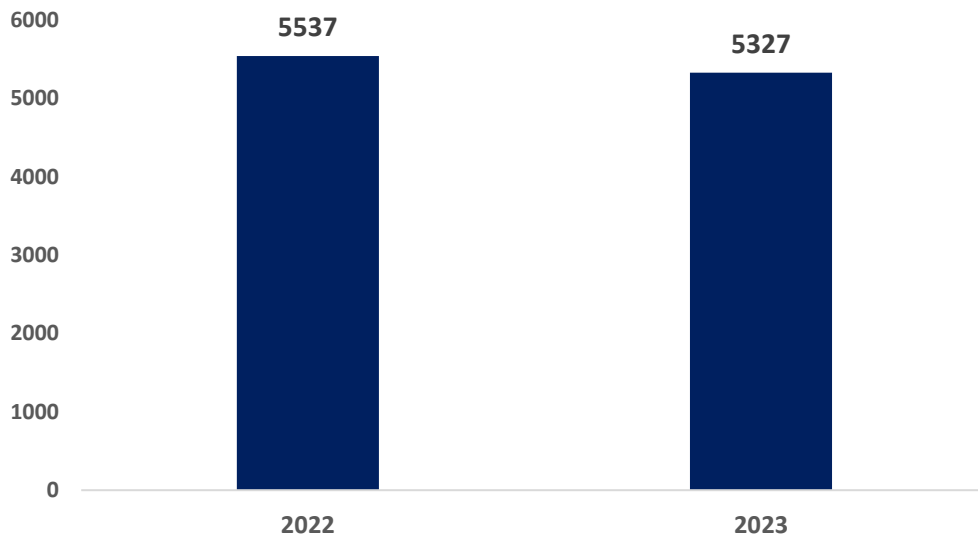


The Red Barn provided a total of 4436 program hours in 2023. This is a 50% increase from our total program hours in 2022.

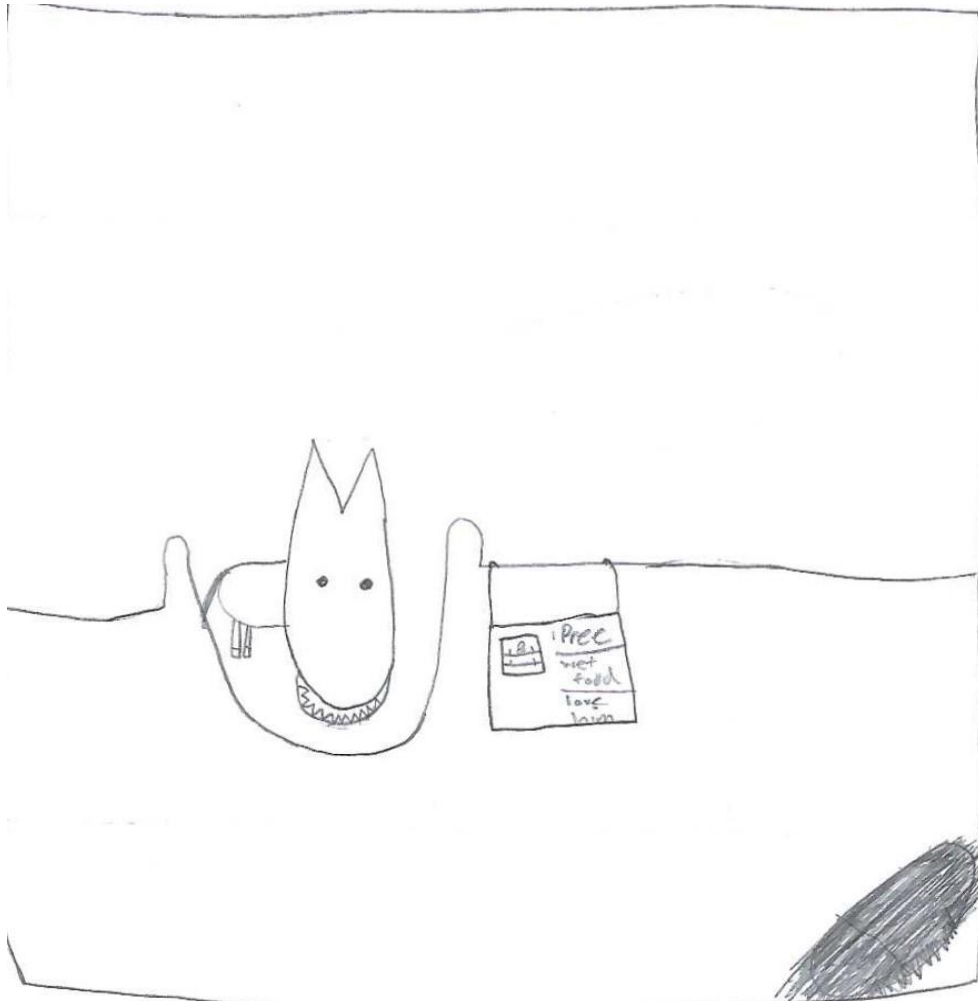


The Red Barn provided 442 program hours to veterans and their families in 2023. All participants received a full scholarship as part of the Cpl. Anthony Clay Ward Program for Veterans and their hours are included in Horsemanship and Learning totals.

## Volunteer Hours



Volunteers logged 5327 hours in 2023.



## Program Evaluation Philosophy

In 2015, we adopted the [Results Based Accountability \(RBA\)](#) framework for our program evaluations. This is based on the work of Mark Friedman in his book *Trying Hard is Not Good Enough*. The RBA framework encourages the measurement of how much was accomplished, how well it was performed, and what difference was made in the lives of those served. The RBA framework uses the example of a high school to explain each section of the framework.

**How much did we do?** This is a question of quantity and is most easily answered. For example, a school might say that they taught 700 students in a given year.

**How well was it performed?** This question moves the focus from quantity to quality. Is there a distinct quality difference in education between a class size of 35 students compared to a class size of 20 students or a class with adequate resources compared to a class with exceptional resources?

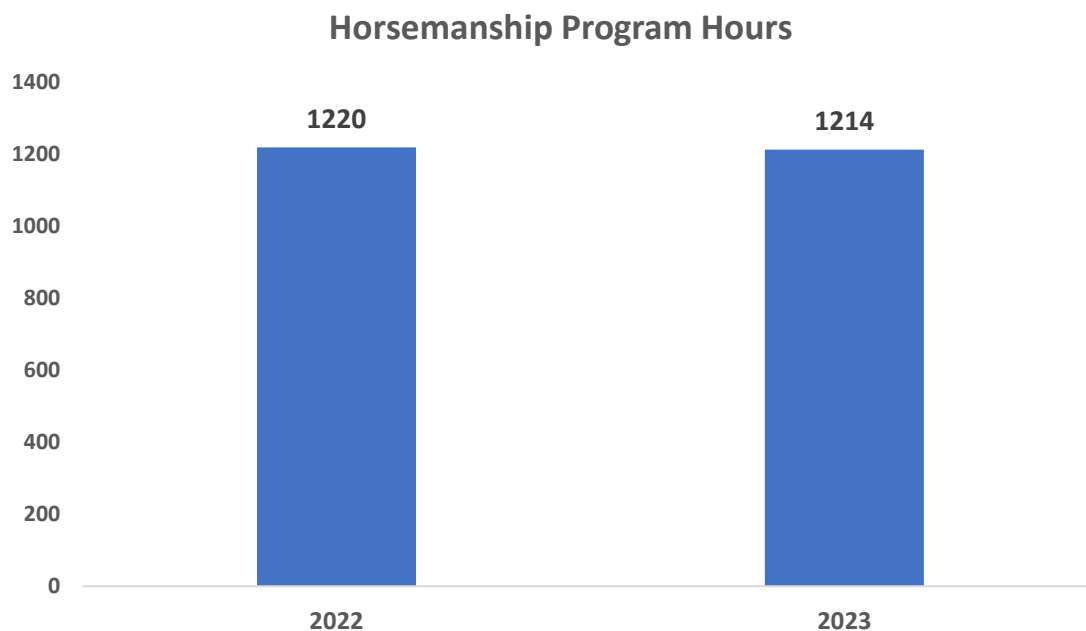
**What difference was made in the lives of those served? Is anyone better off?** These are the most difficult questions to answer because of the long-term implications that must be measured. How can you determine if children in small classes with exceptional resources are better off than children in larger classes with adequate resources? Would you measure by graduation rates? College acceptance? Standardized test scores?

## Program Evaluation – Equine Assisted Services: Horsemanship

The Red Barn’s Equine Assisted Services: Horsemanship programs include:

- Therapeutic (or adaptive) horseback riding: Making horseback riding lessons, as well as the accompanying unmounted horsemanship skills, accessible to individuals with diverse needs.
- Adaptive equestrian sports: Preparing students to compete in horse shows, such as Special Olympics and The Exceptional Cup.

### How much did we do?



Therapeutic Horseback Riding: We provided 1,214 hours of mounted and unmounted horsemanship lessons to individuals with disabilities and special circumstances. This was nearly identical to our 2022 Horsemanship program hours, and we had two fewer riding instructors for most of 2023.

#### Adaptive Equestrian Sports:

In 2020 and 2021, we took students to off-site horse shows. Unfortunately, we were not able to do any off-site shows in 2022 or 2023. Travel costs, particularly gasoline, increased exponentially and inhibited our ability to attend off-site shows. We hope to be able to take more students to horse shows in the near future.

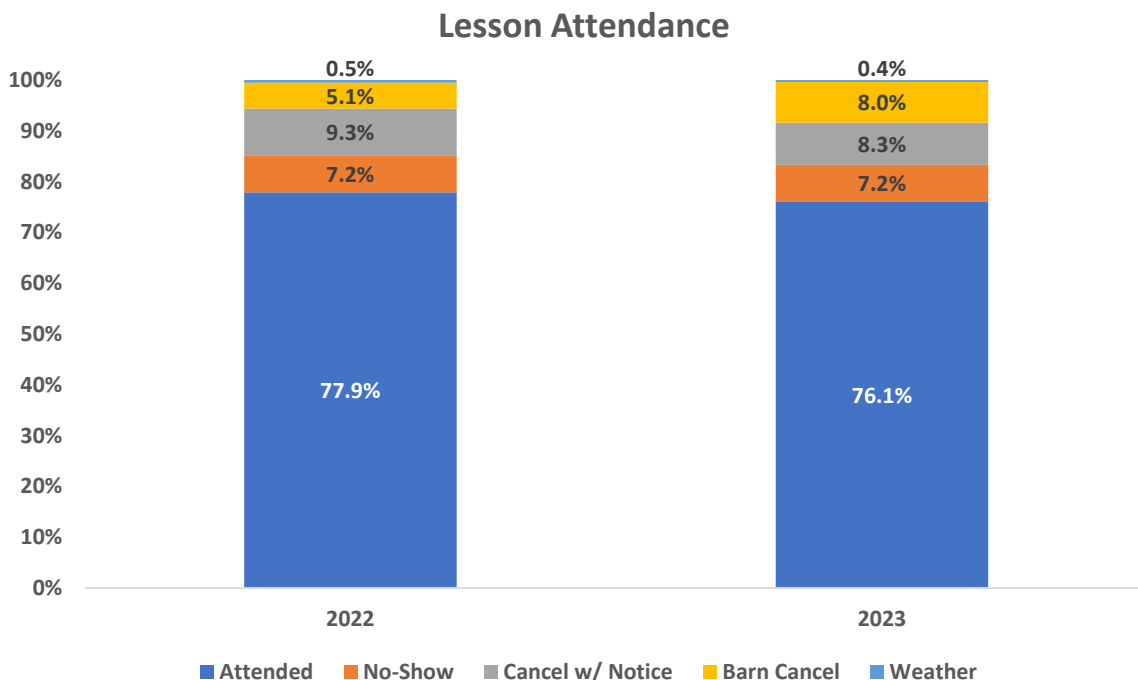
We did have our annual internal horse show offered to all current riding students, which was one of the highest-attended horse shows we’ve ever had. There were 31 individual students in attendance.

## How well was it performed?

In the past, we have used the following statistics to determine how well we taught riding lessons:

- What percentage of lessons were taught?
- What is the demand for the program?
- What are the staff's qualifications?
- How many incident reports were completed?
- What did the students and parents think in satisfaction surveys?
- What riding skills were mastered?

### Percentage of Lessons Taught



Our percentage of lessons taught in 2023 was close to the previous year. In 2022, we were able to provide many lessons with a substitute if the participant's primary instructor was absent. However, due to having fewer instructors (and thus substitutes) in 2023, the barn had to cancel lessons more frequently when the primary instructor was absent.

**Program Demand:** By the end of 2023, there were 97 individuals on our waiting list.

We have a high retention rate in our riding program. We maintained an 80% retention rate between Fall 2022 and Fall 2023. This is a major factor in why our waiting list remains so large. Due to having fewer instructors this past year, we also weren't able to add any new students this past Fall.



Additionally, a high percentage (61%) of our riding students receive a full scholarship. Our waiting list is similar, as 62% of our waiting list students have applied and qualified for a full scholarship. Our program fills a critical need in our community by providing services at no cost for low-income families.

It is also worth noting that all students, even those who do not receive a scholarship, receive a subsidized rate for lessons. It costs more to train our staff and horses to be able to teach students with a wide range of disabilities, but we do not charge more. Donations are used to keep individual lesson prices similar to those at typical riding centers, which allows our programs to remain affordable for our paying students.

### **Staff Qualifications**

Our programs are delivered by employees trained in the following methods and/or certified by the following organizations:

- Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship (PATH)
- Certified Horsemanship Association (CHA)
- New Trails Learning Systems
- Special Olympics
- Natural Lifemanship
- JAYC Foundation
- Transitioning families
- HERD Institute
- Hocus Focus
- Remo HealthRhythms
- Stable Moments
- Glenwood Managing Crisis Safely (MCS)
- The Man O' War Project
- Polyvagal Equine Institute

### **Incident Reports**

An incident report is completed every time someone falls off a horse or requires more than basic first aid. We had one incident report involving a riding student falling off a horse in 2023. Basic first aid was used to lightly treat a small cut, but there were no other injuries. There was one other riding incident report where a staff member fell while riding. They were checked, had no injuries, and resumed riding.

### **Satisfaction Surveys:**

#### Riding Lessons – Parent Surveys (Satisfaction)

At the end of each term, parents are asked to complete a survey about their experience. We ask parents to report their satisfaction with the services their child received, progress their child made, communication with their child's instructor, volunteers working with their child, facility

appearance, and safety features provided at the barn. The surveys received in 2023 remain very high. All were 100% except student progress (98%) and volunteers working with your child (99%).

Parents were also asked to provide suggestions for improvement. We identified three common trends in these suggestions. These are listed below, along with our plan to address them.

- Being at the barn more often/riding more than once a week/longer lesson times. **While we wish we could offer longer lessons or multiple weekly riding lessons for our students, we have a waiting list that is 97 students deep and feel it would be unfair to those children. Our current students have opportunities to sign up for educational camps and classes when those are available.**
- Location/travel time to arrive at the barn. **Unfortunately, we cannot change this, though we empathize with and appreciate our students with longer commutes to the barn.**
- More social activities/interactions with peers. **We focused on providing more individual sign-up equine-assisted learning classes in 2023. We send information about these classes to all of our riding participants as soon as they become available for registration. While these classes may have a more specific focus (job skills, reading, handwriting, etc.), there is a natural social byproduct of being in class with similar-aged peers.**

#### Riding Lessons – Student Surveys (Satisfaction)

Once a year, riding students are sent a satisfaction survey asking if they like coming to the barn, if they like grooming, and if they would like to come back to the barn. Students reported 100% satisfaction to every question posed in the survey.

Students are also asked how they feel when they are at the barn. The specific word “happy” appeared in most surveys. Other common answers were “safe” and “excited.” Some examples of their handwritten answers are below:

How do you feel when you're at the barn?

happy & excited

How do you feel when you're at the barn?

Confident

How do you feel when you're at the barn?

I feel happy when I get to ride the horses.  
I also feel happy when I go on trail rides and  
ground lessons.

**Riding Skills:**

In 2014, we began using the Rider Instruction and Evaluation System (RIDES) to track the mastery of riding skills divided into five levels. Each level contains both mounted and unmounted skills, and mastery is checked at the end of each term.

Students progress at their own pace but in a methodical way. Some skills are mastered quickly, and others may take longer. The point of the RIDES system is not to compare students to each other but only to identify that skill mastery is indeed taking place over time and to outline logical riding skill progression.

In 2023, 11 students moved up a level, and the remaining students all continued to make progress in mastering skills on their current level.

## **What difference was made in the lives of those served? Is anyone better off?**

Our goal is that everything learned at the barn can later be transferred to daily life and relationships with others, but that can be difficult to measure long term. To help answer this, we survey parents to determine if they saw growth in certain areas both at the barn and at home. All of our parents indicated an improvement in at least one area in 2023. Parents also left the below comments.

### Parent Comments:

*My daughter's confidence and courage to work towards achieving difficult goals has consistently grown as she has been coming to the Red Barn. As a result, she has learned to drive a car and been hired to work full time. She never thought she could do it, but The Red Barn experiences gave her the courage to try. It may have taken longer than for others to achieve these goals, but she did it. I attribute this to the lessons she learned at the Red Barn.*

*My daughter loves Waffle and the people at The Red Barn. It's definitely one of her favorite things to do. I think her time at the barn helps her in many ways, whereas other activities only focus on one area that she may need help with... like swimming or speech therapy. We are so thankful for the barn.*

*Red Barn has given our child her own "sport" to shine in. My daughter can do this activity without having her disability highlighted.*

*It feels like the only real stability for him and that stability is invaluable. You all give me information I need about when he seems to be out of sorts and I trust that he can express his concerns and be given supportive yet constructive feedback.*

*The Covid years were hard on her. Rebuilding her confidence in riding skills and levels...builds confidence to tackle new things and return to other activities.*

*This is his primary outlet and he seems to really enjoy it. I feel like Red Barn is more in tune with the kinds of supports he needs than other people we encounter and because of this he is most comfortable at the barn and with the barn staff.*

*My daughter's total experience at The Red Barn is heaven sent. She loves it so much! The care and expertise of all the staff is amazing. What she learns at The Red Barn is formative & affects all aspects of her life. It is heaven on earth-grace abounds.*

*The Red Barn is my daughter's favorite place to be. We have seen huge gains in not only her core strength and coordination, but also socially - she has become a lot less shy and more willing to talk to a variety of people in many different settings.*

## Riding Lessons – Student Surveys (what they learned)

Once a year, riding students are sent a satisfaction survey. We included the satisfaction portion of that survey earlier, but we also asked the students what they have learned. Here are some examples of students expressing what they have gained during their time at the barn:

What have you learned at the barn? I do not run, stay calm around the horse.  
Pree is so sensitive to move, when I get off Pree  
When I brush Pree behind him, I pat his big butty, he knows where I am in front, and behind him

What have you learned at the barn?

- Confidence
- Different ways to ride
- Having a good day

What have you learned at the barn?

Two Point, patterns, walk through a circle.  
Keeping the horse on task and not day dreaming or looking away from where I am trying to go.

What have you learned at the barn?

Horses don't eat donuts.

## University of Alabama School of Social Work SDQ Study

Since 2018, we have been working with the University of Alabama School of Social Work to conduct a research study on our participant population. The study utilizes the [Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire \(SDQ\)](#), which is a 25-question behavioral screening questionnaire about children ages 4 to 17. The questionnaire is intended to be completed by guardians. Each question is scored and grouped into a subcategory. The subcategories are:

- Conduct problems
- Hyperactivity
- Emotional problems
- Peer problems
- Prosocial
- Externalizing (combines conduct + hyperactivity),
- Internalizing (combines emotional and peer problems)

There is also a score for total difficulties.

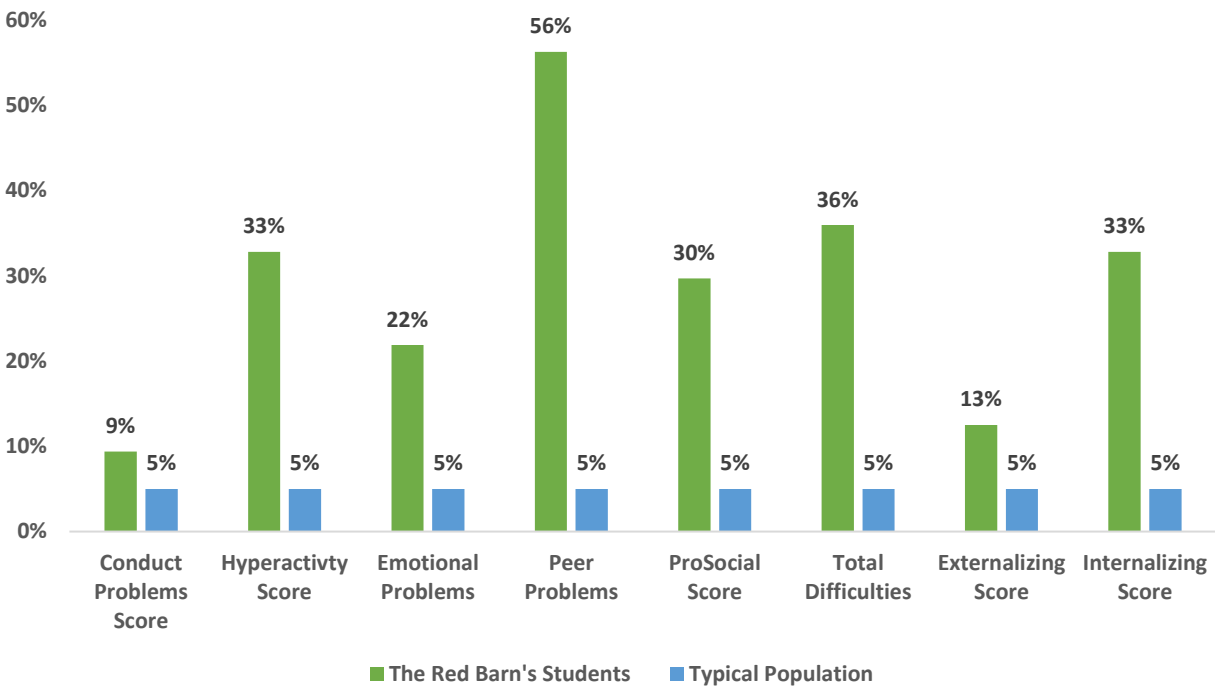
Each subcategory is not only scored but also compared to the average score of the general population ages 4 to 17. Those who score in the top 80 percentile are considered to be functioning close to average; those scoring in the 81-90 percentile are considered to have slightly raised difficulties/lower functioning; 91-95 percentile are considered to have a high rate of difficulties; 96-100 are considered to have a very high rate of difficulties.

More simply put, in a randomly selected classroom of 20 students, you would expect:

- 16 students (80%) to function normally with little to no difficulty
- 2 students (10%) to have slightly raised difficulties/lower functioning
- 1 student (5%) to have a high rate of difficulties/lower functioning
- 1 student (5%) to have a very high rate of difficulties/lower functioning

The following chart shows the percentage of our students who have reported a very high rate of difficulty in each respective category. This helps us better understand how our participants function in comparison to their peers. Having this data from these surveys demonstrates the need we meet in our community. It also helps us track potential growth/benefits our participants experience from our programs.

## % of Population With a Very High Rate of Difficulties



The SDQ is included in the post-term survey we send to guardians of riding participants. It is also sent before and after certain educational classes.

The University of Alabama is still compiling this data, and we hope to have more information about the impact of our riding program soon.

However, we are proud to announce that The Red Barn was a contributor to a study published in 2023. The study tracked changes in pre-term and post-term SDQ scores for children participating in an educational class curriculum at The Red Barn and partner organizations across the United States.

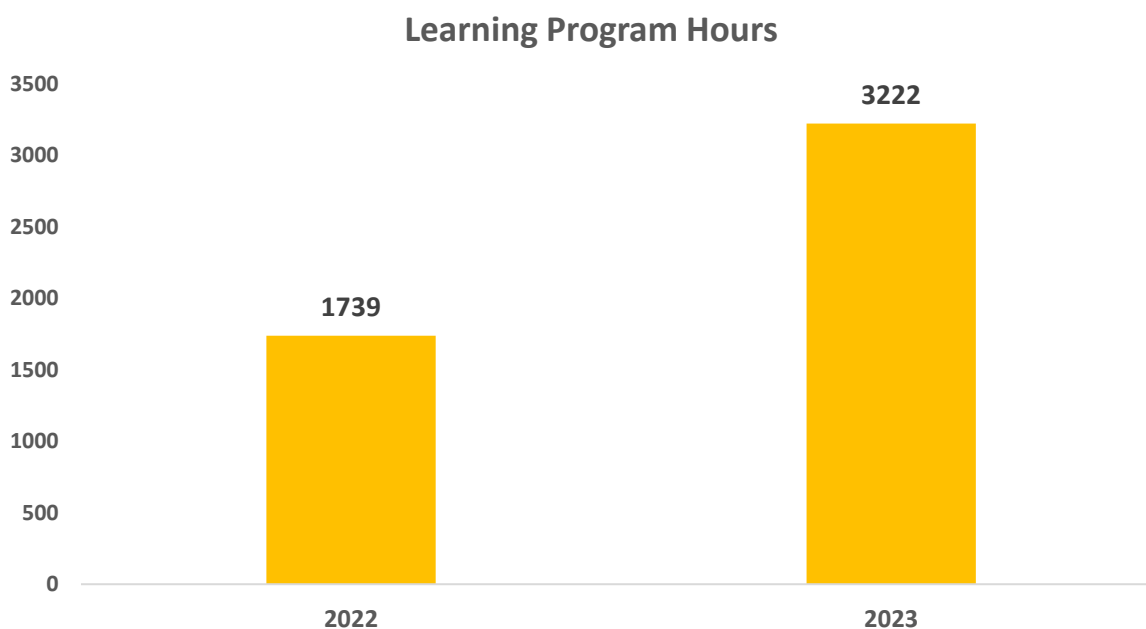
[Feasibility Study of an Equine-Assisted Learning Intervention for Children with Disabilities](#)

## Program Evaluation – Equine Assisted Services: Learning

The Red Barn’s Equine Assisted Services: Learning programs include:

- Equine-assisted learning in education: Focusing on academic skills, character development, and the promotion of relevant life skills, such as problem-solving and critical thinking skills.
- Equine-assisted learning in organizations: Assisting organizations and other workgroups to build effective teams and leaders that enhance work dynamics and performance.
- Equine-assisted learning in personal development: Assisting individuals and groups to discover new ways to face life challenges and opportunities by developing skills in effective problem-solving, decision-making, critical and creative thinking, and communication.

### How much did we do?



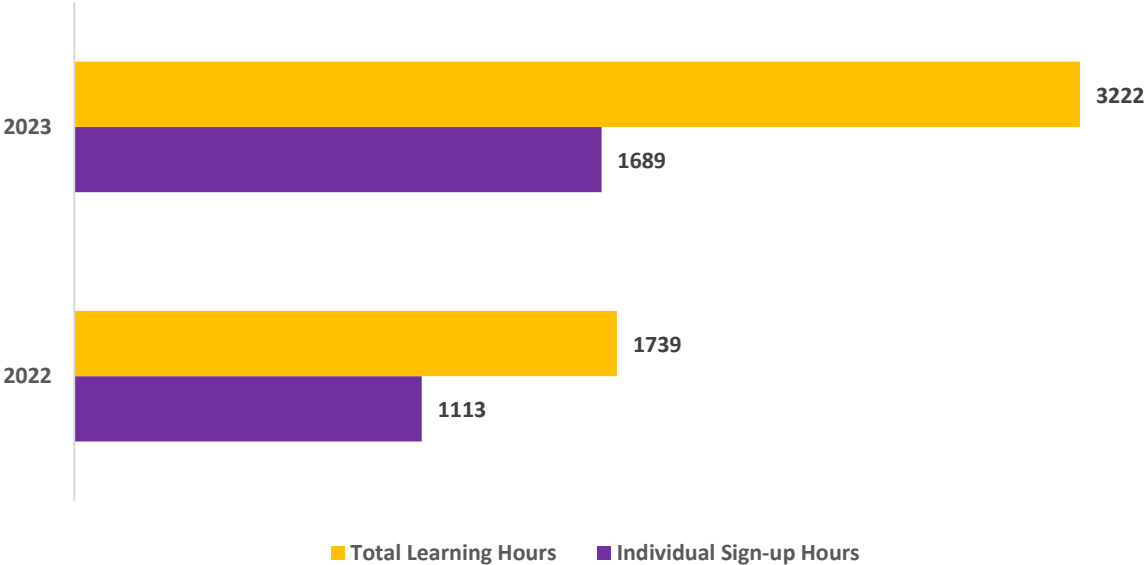
The Red Barn provided 3222 Learning program hours in 2023. This is nearly double what we provided in 2022.



We made a point to increase our Learning program hours this past year. Our primary focus was to create more individual sign-up classes, which are classes that primarily consist of our current and waitlist students. Here's a list of the individual sign-up weekly classes we provided in 2023:

- Job Skills
- Pencils & Ponies
- Horse-Powered Reading
- Brain Builders
- Stable Reactions
- Gardening Club
- Teen Boy Social Group
- Social Language Class (Partnering with Vulcan Psychology)

### Individual Sign-up Hours Compared to Total Learning Hours

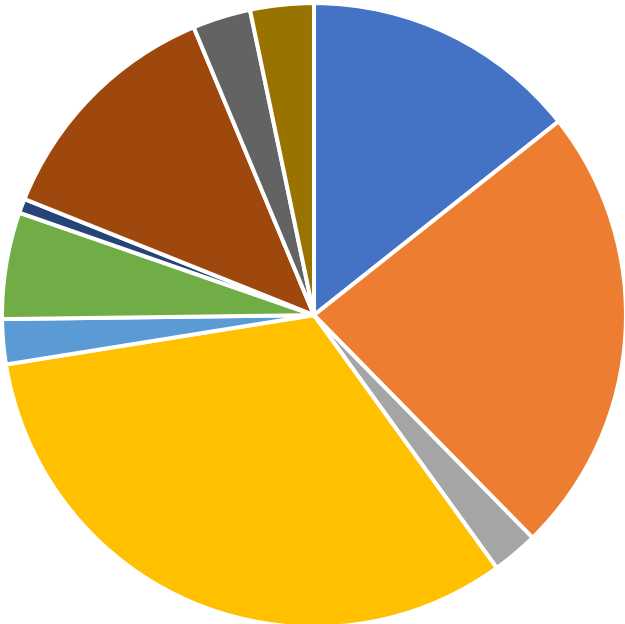


We provided 1689 hours of equine-assisted learning programs with individual sign-ups in 2023. This is the most hours of individual sign-up learning programs we have ever provided. These classes accounted for over 52% of our total learning program hours this past year. We plan to continue focusing on these specific hours in the future, as we feel they provide the deepest and most meaningful impact.

With the end of the pandemic, we were also able to host more school field trips and one-time visits from outside organizations.

The graph below shows the breakdown of all our learning program hours in 2023.

2023 Learning Hours



- Job Skills (462)
- Weekly Classes (751)
- One-time Individ. (77)
- One-time Other Org. (1045)
- APAC Weekly (75)
- Barn Chores (178)
- Evaluations (24)
- Trainings (407)
- VA Group (97)
- Parent Education (106)

### **How well was it performed?**

We provided surveys to students, parents, and leaders from outside agencies at the end of each equine-assisted learning class. We received 100% satisfaction for all these surveys in 2023.

We did have two incident reports for our learning classes in 2023. Both cases involved students tripping and falling. Basic first aid was administered to tend to minor scrapes, but nothing else was needed in either situation.

### **What difference was made in the lives of those served? Is anyone better off?**

In our surveys provided to equine-assisted learning class students, 100% answered “yes” to the question “Did you learn something new?”

Our job skills class is one of our term-long classes. Job skills focuses on developing soft skills needed for success in a work environment. Students participate in age-level discussions about time management, teamwork, assembly lines, and quality control. Students then practice these skills in a supported work environment as they complete their job assignments.

In late 2022, we began using the Model of Human Occupation Screening Tool (MOHOST) to track job skills student progress. The MOHOST addresses motivation for occupation, pattern of occupation, communication/interaction, process/motor skills, and environment. Each student is scored for different skills in these categories on the first and last days of class.

For the Summer 2023 cohort, all 5 students saw an improvement from their total first-day score to their total last-day score. The mean total score for the class improved by 32% from the first day to the last day.

In 2023, we introduced Pencils & Ponies, a class focusing on handwriting skills in children ages 6-10. We used the assessment in the “Size Matters” curriculum to get a sample of their handwriting at the beginning of the first class and the end of the last class. However, many of the students were out of town for the final session. The students who did attend showed improvement. Going forward, we plan on getting a sample of each student’s handwriting after each class to track their improvements on a weekly basis.

## Conclusion

Our focus in 2023 was to balance providing more individualized experiences while serving as many people as possible. We feel that the data in this program evaluation reflects our success.

Our equine-assisted horsemanship program nearly maintained identical hours to 2022 despite us having fewer instructors in 2023. We hope to provide even more riding lessons in 2024. The creation of a registered apprenticeship will create a pipeline for future therapeutic riding instructors, both at The Red Barn and across the entire United States.

Our equine-assisted learning program saw a drastic increase in hours provided. We will continue to focus on providing individual sign-up classes while also looking for opportunities to serve schools and other organizations in our community that could benefit from working with horses.

We believe that our programs are the highest quality they have ever been. As we look to 2024 and the future, we aim to continue to be a standard-bearer within the therapeutic riding and equine-assisted services industry.

