



## **2024 PROGRAM EVALUATION**

### **2024 Overview**

The Red Barn experienced more significant transitions in 2024 than we had in any previous year of our organization's 13-year existence.

Joy O'Neal, the barn's founder who had served as Executive Director since inception, stepped down in July. Joy remains the president of the organization's board of directors.

Ellen Davis, the barn's Operations Director who had overseen programs and been our head instructor since 2017, retired in November after slowly having to reduce her hours throughout the Fall.

Several other long-time staff also experienced life changes that made them need to leave the barn. The remaining staff needed to learn and grow into the roles that Joy and Ellen had been handling for many years, which caused a shifting of resources. Fewer total staff members meant we had fewer people to care for our horses, so we also had to reduce the size of our herd through natural attrition. Our current instructors have each had to take on more riding students, too.

Thankfully, our staff learned a great deal from Joy and Ellen's many years of leadership, and we have endured this period of change. Our programs remain as high quality as ever, and we provided more total program hours in 2024 than we did in 2023 even with fewer staff.

### **Terminology**

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



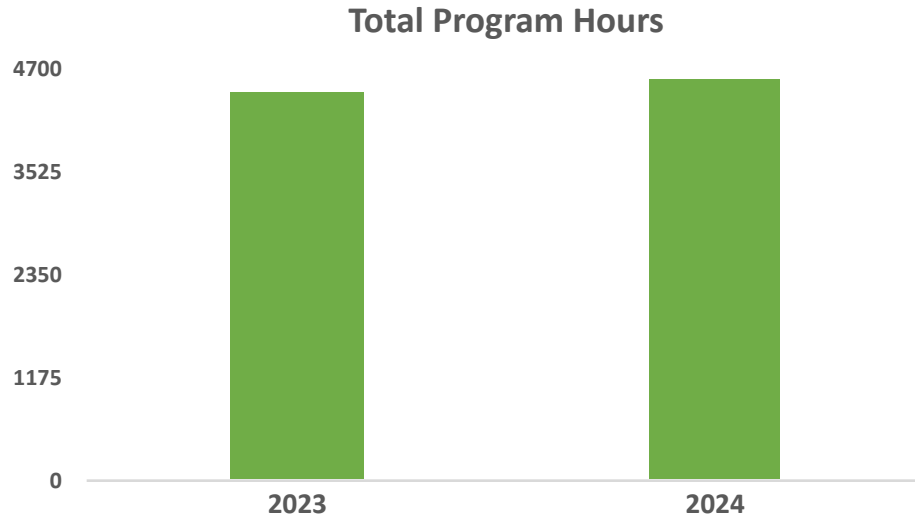
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Faith, Hope & Love

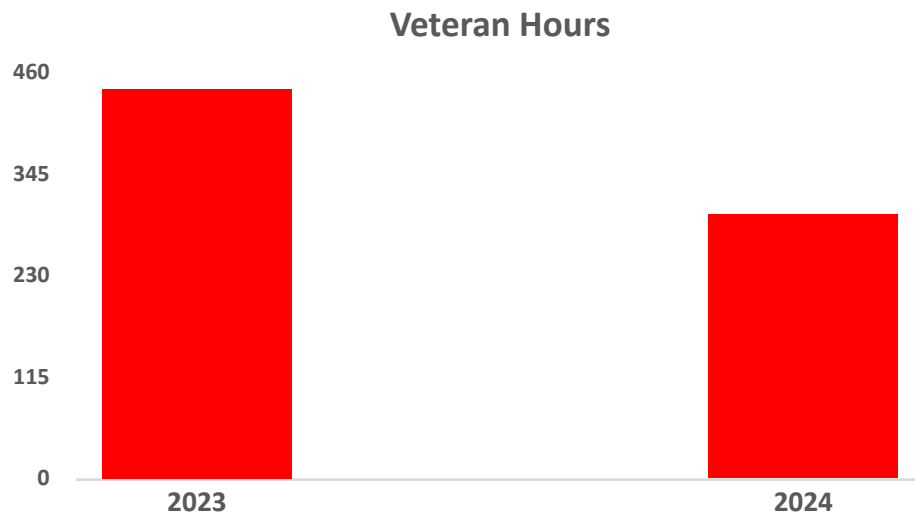
In order to be aligned with our industry's new terminology, we reclassified our programs into these broad categories. More specific information can be found in the article *Optimal Terminology for Services in the United States That Incorporate Horses to Benefit People: A*

*Consensus Document* by Wendy Wood, Kathy Alm, Joann Benjamin, Lynn Thomas, Debbie Anderson, Lissa Pohl, and Michele Kane.

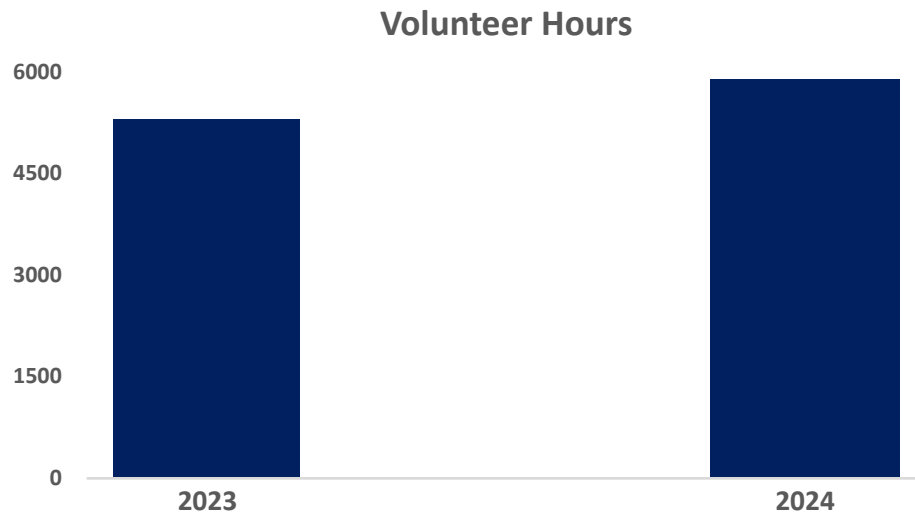
### **Program Evaluation - Total Hours, Veteran Hours, Volunteer Hours**



The Red Barn provided a total of 4607 program hours in 2024 compared to 4436 hours in 2023.



The Red Barn provided 301 program hours to veterans and their families in 2024 compared to 442 hours 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.



Volunteers logged 5885 hours in 2024 compared to 5327 hours in 2023. The Independent Sector value of a volunteer hour in Alabama in 2024 was \$30.39, meaning that volunteers contributed the equivalent of \$178,845.15 of labor.

## 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?

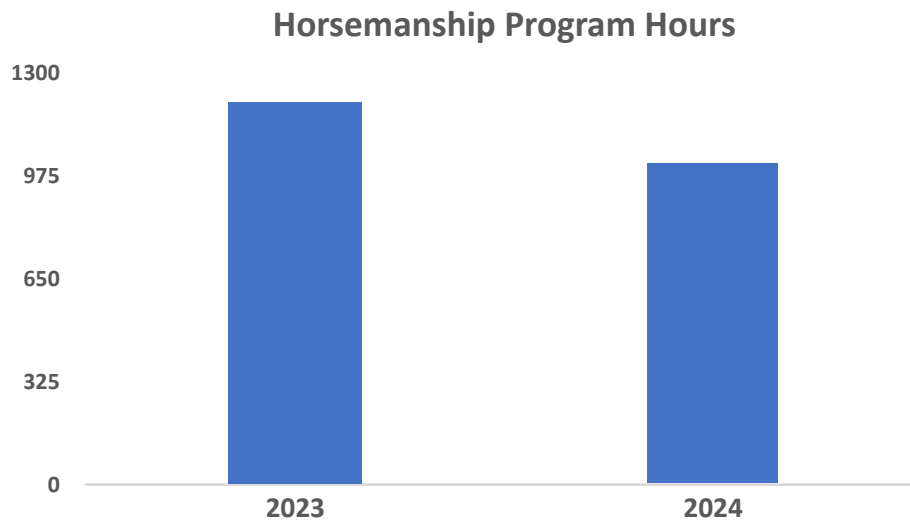
**What difference was made in the lives of those served? Is anyone better off?** These are the most difficult questions to answer because of the long-term implications that must be measured. How can you determine if children in small classes with exceptional resources are better off than children in 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 1021 hours of mounted and unmounted horsemanship lessons to individuals with disabilities and special circumstances. This is a decline from our 2023 horsemanship program hours. However, as noted earlier, we had a reduced amount of staff (including instructors) and horses in 2024, so fewer Horsemanship hours were expected.

#### Adaptive Equestrian Sports:

In 2020 and 2021, we took students to off-site horse shows. Unfortunately, we have not been able to do any off-site shows in subsequent years. 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 future.

We did have our annual internal horse show offered to current riding students in November. There were 20 individual students in attendance. Due to having a reduced staff and herd, the

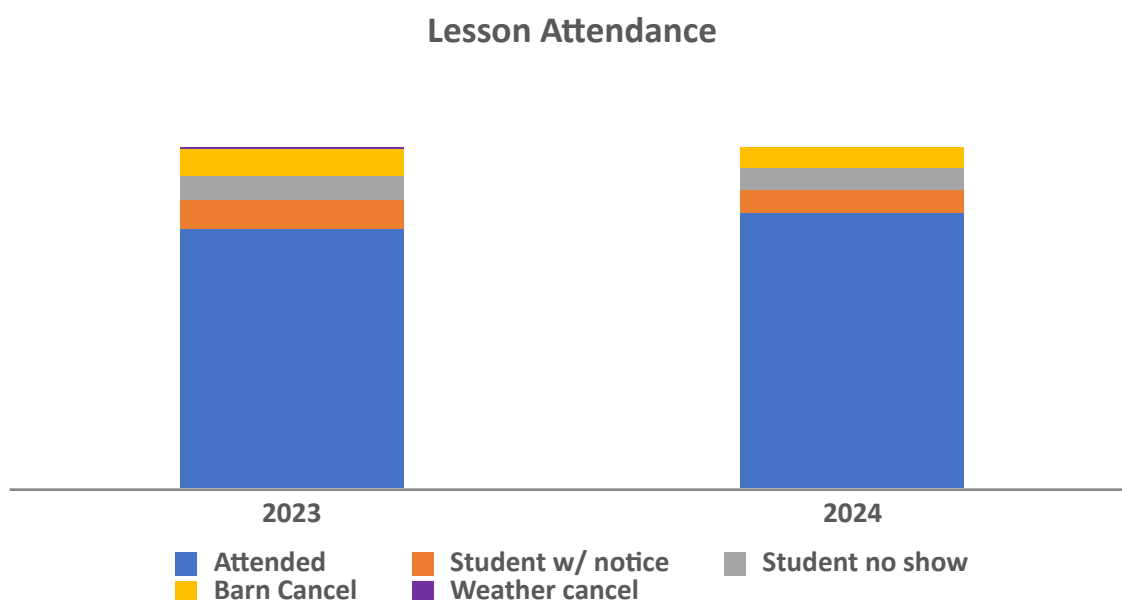
November show was offered primarily to our younger students. We offered make-up horse show to 9 of our older students in May of 2025.

## 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



2024 saw our best ever lesson attendance in any given year. Student cancellations saw a 2.2% reduction and barn cancellations saw a 2.1% reduction. This was a concerted effort. Regular attendance is important to us so that we can maintain equity towards the children on our waiting list. We began reporting lesson attendance to parents in 2023 so they would be aware of their own child's attendance. This awareness led to a noticeable bump in 2024. We were also determined to reduce our own cancellations, which we accomplished even with fewer instructors and horses.

**Program Demand:** By the end of 2024, there were 86 individuals on our waiting list.

We have a high retention rate in our riding program. We maintained a 78% retention rate between the Fall 2023 and Fall 2024 terms. This is a major factor in why our waiting list remains so large. Despite this retention rate and having fewer staff and horses in 2024, we still managed



to add 8 new riding students for the Fall 2024 term. In fact, we had more Horsemanship program hours in the Fall 2024 than any other term through both 2023 and 2024.

Additionally, 66% of our riding students receive a scholarship. Our waiting list is similar, as 63% of our waiting list students have applied and qualified for a scholarship. Our program fills a critical need in our community by providing services at no cost for low-income families.

We redesigned our scholarship system in 2024. We've included the updated chart below.

If your annual income from all sources is:

# People Living in the Home	Below	Between	Above
1	\$56,598	\$56,599 - \$113,196	\$113,197
2	\$67,953	\$67,954 - \$135,906	\$135,907
3	\$77,419	\$77,420 - \$154,838	\$154,839
4	\$94,659	\$94,660 - \$189,318	\$189,319
5	\$104,559	\$104,560 - \$209,118	\$209,119
6	\$114,459	\$114,460 - \$228,918	\$228,919
7	\$124,359	\$124,360 - \$248,718	\$248,719
8	\$134,259	\$134,260 - \$268,518	\$268,519
Individual Riding Lesson Cost	\$200	\$200	\$200
Amount Subsidized by Donations	\$190	\$175	\$115
<b>Individual Riding Lesson Cost</b>	<b>\$10</b>	<b>\$25</b>	<b>\$85</b>

We still offer lessons at \$0 for veterans or for those with extenuating circumstances. With the new scholarship system, 12% of riding students pay nothing at all. 42% pay \$10/lesson. 12% pay \$25/lesson. It is also worth noting that all students, even those who do not receive any scholarship, receive a subsidized rate for lessons. To account for cancellations, we also only charge for at-most 6 lessons in 10-week term. 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
- 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 2024. The instructor and the child's mother evaluated her after the fall. She had no injuries and was able to resume riding that same lesson. There was one other incident in a riding lesson where a volunteer's ankle was stepped on by a horse. They swapped out of the lesson to examine and treat the injury.

## Parent/Student 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 2024 remain extremely high. All were 100% except student progress (99%).

Parents were also asked to provide suggestions for improvement. We identified four 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 86 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.
- Information about lessons/skills being worked on for parents who cannot regularly bring their child. This is something we will look into. Parents do have the ability to watch their child ride at our annual horse show, but we can look for more ways to share progress updates with parents who aren't able to regularly watch their child's lessons.
- Several older students are interested in volunteering. We have provided a Job Skills class in the past as well as individual lessons where students help a staff member with barn chores. We have had to reduce these due to staffing changes but hope to continue this in the future. We also have had several students become volunteers and even staff members. We would be happy to explore volunteering with students who have proven themselves as capable volunteers through experience in Job Skills or chore lessons.

#### Riding Lessons – Student Surveys (Self-reported Progress)

At the end of 2024, we distributed surveys to our riding students. These are self-reported surveys. Instructors asked the questions and aided the students as needed, but we encouraged our students to be honest about their responses. We asked a series of questions asking if coming to the barn helped them either physically, socially, emotionally, or with self-esteem. The results are below.

- 78% reported having better balance or coordination
- 94% reported feeling stronger or having better endurance
- 100% reported communicating better
- 83% reported relating to others better
- 94% reported feeling calmer
- 100% reported feeling happier
- 100% reported feeling more confident

#### **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 2024, 8 students moved up a level, and the remaining students all continued to make progress in mastering skills on their current level. It is worth noting that we currently have more students at levels 3 and 4 than in any other recent years. Students are working on riding

independently at those levels, so progress often takes longer since these are more challenging skills that these riders are learning.

### **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 2024. Parents also left the below comments.

#### Parent Comments:

*My daughter lives in a frequent state of worry/anxiety over the next steps in our day and week. She is easily overstimulated, anxious, and “stims” repeatedly throughout the day. At the Red Barn, we have not once seen her stim. She is relaxed, she enjoys her time, and her body is fluid while riding. When she rides it is like it is just her and Mazie, her brain is quiet and peaceful, and she laughs and interacts with Erin and Millie and is genuinely happy. For my husband and I, seeing her so relaxed and peaceful has at times been emotional for us. We are so grateful and words really can’t describe how appreciative we are of the team at the Red Barn. Thank you for what you do!*

*The Red Barn is one of my daughter’s absolute things to do (other than get a frozen coke from Bucee’s). She enjoys going to the barn, seeing her friends, her instructors, and the horses. She feels fully at home at the barn, and I really appreciate what they do for her and all the other kids.*

*I think to see and witness the interactions between staff and each student...is a moment to experience the relationship and connections being built. I am not sure a picture or video can adequately portray what is happening in a lesson, camp, or experience. More lives are changing than just the person/student present and being served by The Red Barn.*

*It helps me provide an opportunity to see the true face of my daughter, not the mask she typically wears to appear normal. She is relaxed at the Red Barn, and anxious in most other settings.*

*The Red Barn means more to me than I can describe. It is a place where loving experts teach my child life lessons, social skills, coping skills, and accountability. My child learns these valuable lessons while having the most fun riding horses. She is joyful & proud of herself, & that makes me joyful & proud for her, too.*

*At one time, I never imagined that my autistic daughter would have a job, or be able to drive a car, or make friends or even date. Thanks to the confidence and courage she has gained through her lessons at the Red Barn, my daughter has achieved far more than I thought possible. She graduated high school, learned to drive (and now drives herself to her lessons), has a full time job, and several friends. She is even dating now! I don't think she would have achieved so much without the skills she gained at the Red Barn.*

*Means a safe place for her to be 'who she is' and not worry about peer pressure. I love that the barn staff is always excited to see her and asks her about "what's been going on" and truly listens.*

*It means that my child has a safe space to learn a new hobby. She's connected with the horse and her instructor and I've never been more proud of her. We are so thankful that The Red Barn is apart of our community and provides lessons to children just like our daughter. The red barn is invaluable!*

*Red Barn is such a healing place for children and their families. It provides my daughter with a special sport that is hers alone. She attends many sporting events for brothers and cousins and at the annual horse show she never stops smiling as it's time for them to see HER shine in something. My daughter has a soft spot for animals so being with the horses is wonderful for her emotionally also.*

*My son leaves is excited all week to spend time at the Red Barn and he always leaves happy. He has shown much growth in the area of working through steps to accomplish a goal. He is able to listen and communicate better because of the Red Barn. He loves to engage in conversations about his time at the Red Barn. We are thankful for the impact it has had on his life.*

*My son is already a very outgoing child, but he continued to blossom after he started attending camps and classes at The Red Barn. Each week he loves to count down to the days when he gets to come back. He loves sharing with his friends that he gets to ride horses and be in horse shows. The Red Barn has brought so much joy to my son that he doesn't even realize how much it has helped him with his posture and upper body strength.*

*During our time with the Red Barn, my daughter has built confidence, increased her physical capabilities, and grown in her emotional regulation. The Red Barn isn't just about horses, it's about helping children harness their capabilities through the use of horses.*

*Riding at The Red Barn has been such an amazing experience for our girls! It is truly their "Happy Place!" They both feel loved and accepted at the barn. Their instructors do such a good job of both encouraging them and yet challenging them to grow and learn. Our time at the barn has been a pivotal part of our girls lives.*

## 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)

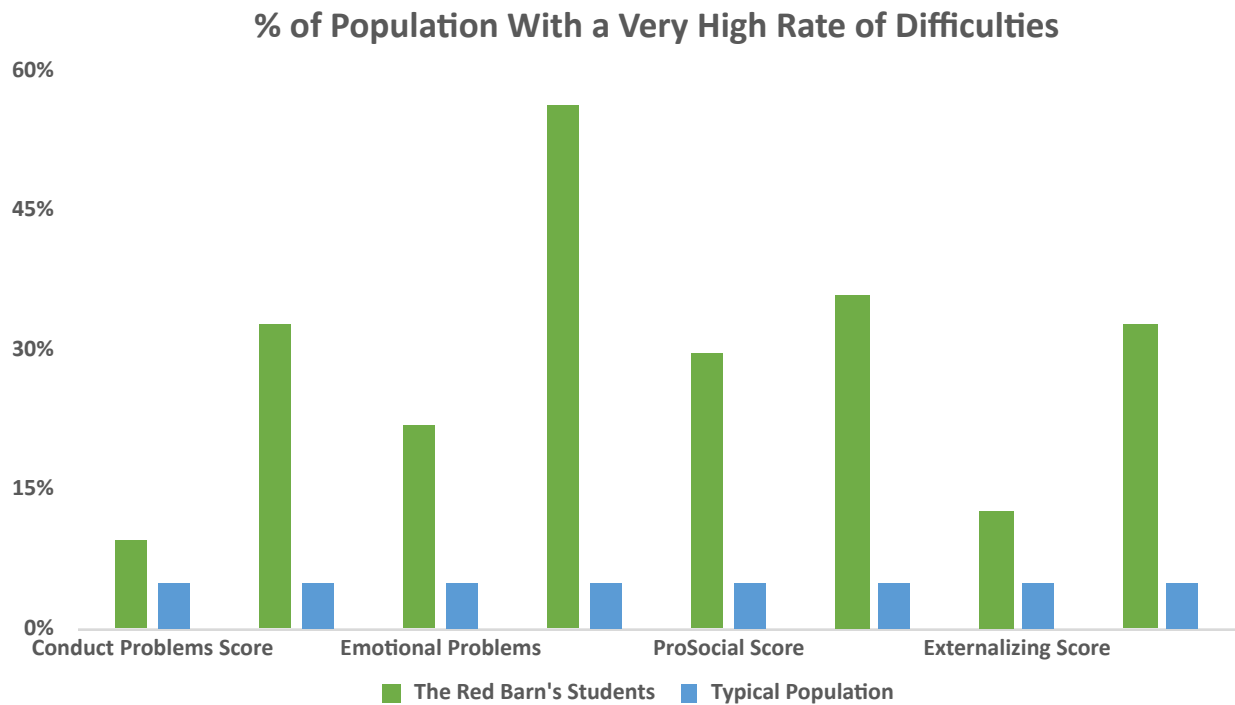
There is also a score for total difficulties.

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.



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.

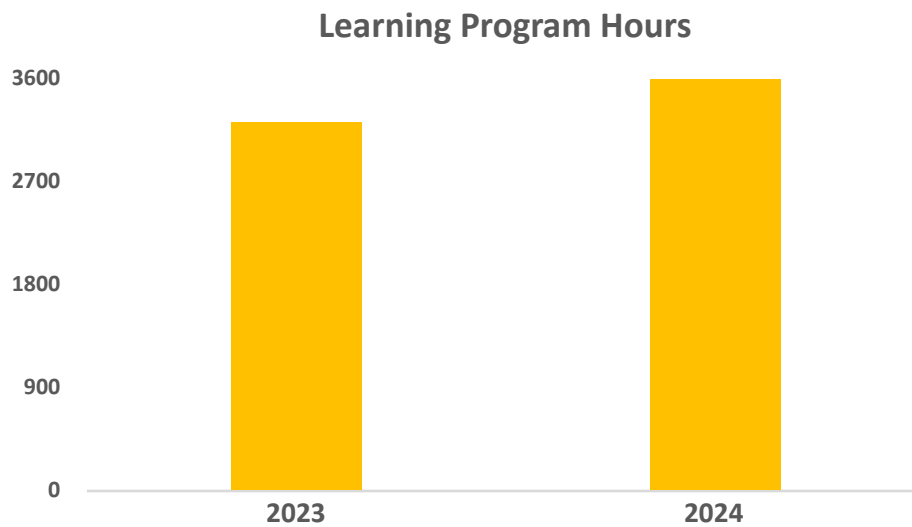
[Feasibility Study of an Equine-Assisted Learning Intervention for Children with Disabilities](#)

## 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?



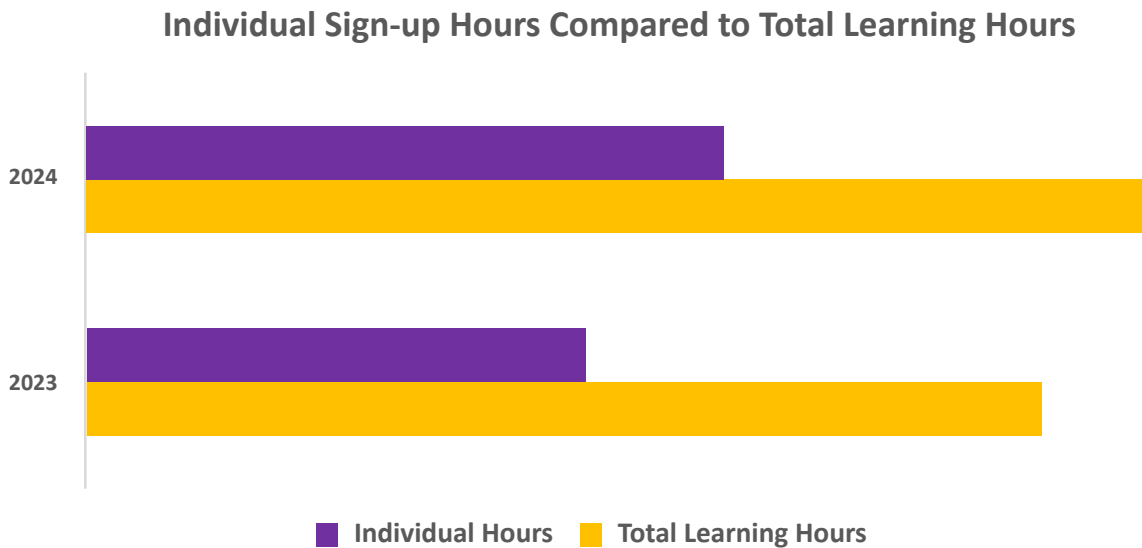
The Red Barn provided 3586 Learning program hours in 2024 compared to 3222 hours in 2023.

We made a point to increase our Learning program hours in 2023, which we continued to do in 2024. Our primary focus was to create more individual sign-up for current and waitlist students. Here's a list of some of the individual sign-up weekly classes we provided in 2024:

- Job Skills
- Pencils & Ponies
- Brain Builders
- Stable Reactions
- Gardening Club



- Teen Boy Social Group
- Social Language Class (Partnering with Vulcan Psychology)



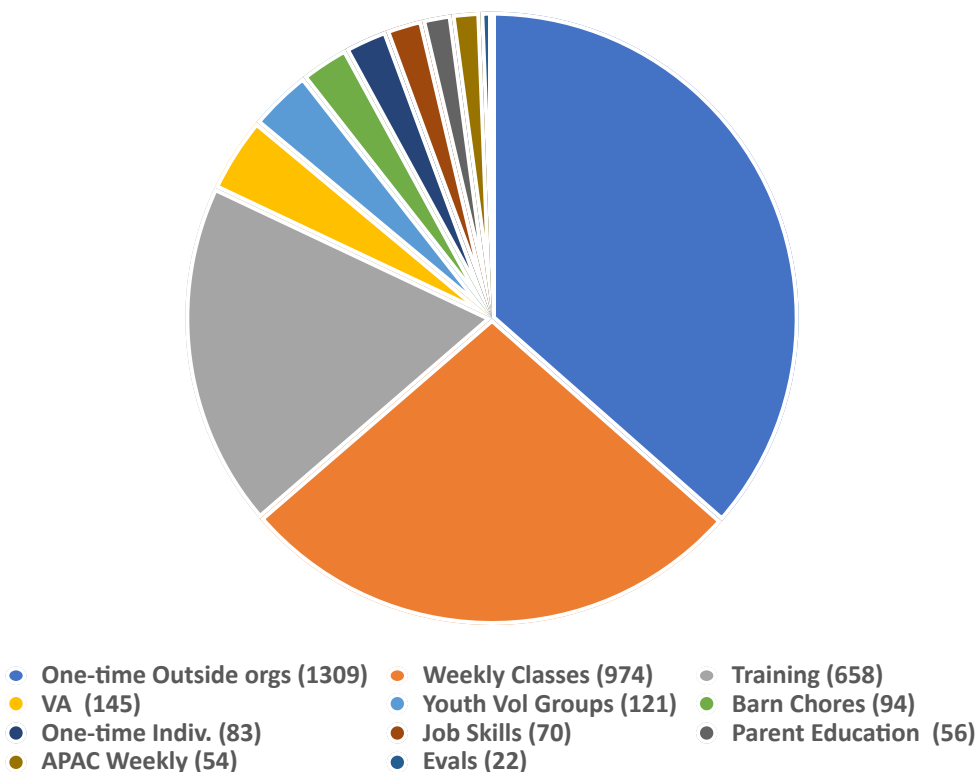
We provided 2156 hours of equine-assisted learning programs with individual sign-ups in 2024. This is the most hours of individual sign-up learning programs we have ever provided. These classes accounted for over 60% of our total learning program hours this past year.

Since these individual sign-up classes are provided to participants who directly sought our services out, and since we generally have a more balanced staff to participant ratio for these groups, we feel these the deepest and most meaningful impact among our learning programs. We plan to continue to focus on them. That said, with the changes to our staff that came in late 2024, we have far fewer instructors who led these individual sign-up groups available in 2025. We will still continue to provide them as much as we possibly can, but this is a reality we face for next year.

After the end of the pandemic, we also made it a point to host more school field trips and one-time visits from outside organizations. We continued to do this in 2024 and aim to further collaborations with local schools, nonprofits, and other organizations that serve our student populations in the future. Other organizations we served either on a one-time or recurring basis include: Alabama Head Injury Foundation, Amelia Center, APAC, ARC of Shelby County, Birmingham Promise, Christ the King's youth group, Crestline Elementary School, Crossroads Christian School, Faith Community Christian School, The Foundry, JBS Mental Health Authority, Leeds FTA, Mississippi State University, NAMI, Oak Tree Ministries, Spain Park High School, Tarrant City Schools, UAB Nursing Clinicals, UAB Sickle Cell Clinic, the Birmingham VA, and Valley Christian Church.

The graph below shows the breakdown of all our learning program hours in 2024.

**2024 Learning Program Hours**



**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 2024.

We did have two incident reports for our learning classes in 2024. In one incident, an adult participant tipped over backwards in his wheelchair while turning. Basic first aid was administered to tend to minor scrapes, but nothing else was needed. In the other incident, a participant attending a field trip had a panic attack. EMS were brought out as a precaution, and the individual's condition resolved naturally.

**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?"

## Conclusion

We are proud of what we accomplished in 2024 even with all the changes we experienced. We are greatly appreciative of all the years of dedication from Joy and Ellen, and we are excited to continue building upon the legacy of all those who have poured their hearts into the barn.

For 2025, our primary focus will be to continue providing quality programming. With a reduced staff and herd, we may not be able to maintain exponential growth where we continue to increase our program hours year-over-year. However, we will continue to do everything in our power to serve as many children as possible while staying true to our ideal of providing an excellent experience to every individual who steps foot on the barn's property.

