



History

Majestic Hills Ranch program, founded in 1997, offers Therapeutic Horseback Riding and Equine Assisted Therapy.

Majestic Hills Ranch (MHR) is a nonprofit organization that provides reputable, safe, and enjoyable therapeutic riding to children and young adults with special needs, and rehabilitative services to injured Veterans. Many individuals are either born with a disability, or through disease, an injury, neglect, trauma, or abuse, they suffer from many different challenges. Whether physical, mental, or emotional, the disability or chronic illness becomes the first of many trials these individuals will face. The simple chores of everyday living that healthy people take for granted create anxiety, fear, and sometimes a sense of failure for people facing mental or physical difficulties, and this prevents them from participating fully in life.

Jackie, the granddaughter of the Foundation's Chair Kim Howard, was born with Recurrent Respiratory Papillomas – a disease of the airway. Her life expectancy was estimated to be short, but her feisty spirit kept her going. At 6 years old, they diagnosed lung cancer and operated to remove the lower right lobe of her lung and then went on various chemotherapy treatments which disabled her greatly. Jackie could no longer walk or lift her legs; she ached all over. It was then that Kim Howard thought of therapeutic horse riding to loosen her muscles, for none of the other therapies had worked. Once Jackie was placed on the horse, she was again smiling, and even seemed to forget the pain and her disability while riding. It only took about four weeks and Jackie was not only walking, giggling, dancing, and roller skating down the street, she was riding every day and gaining more confidence and strength than ever! Yes, Jackie's life was short – she passed at 19 years of age from lung cancer, but the animals helped her keep her strength and spirits up.

Having experienced the benefits of riding therapy first hand with Jackie, and seeing the amazing results physically, emotionally, socially that was a direct result of working with animals; Kim Howard decided to create the same advantage for other children who face difficult challenges. Majestic Hills Ranch, 105 acres of beautiful rolling hills located in scenic Dakota County, was purchased in 1997. In 1998, a Board was formed, and Majestic Hills Ranch was now a reality. In 1999, MHR gained was granted a 501(c)(3) status.

Throughout the years, the generous support of various foundations, companies, and individuals has allowed the ranch to expand from the original, single 12-stall stable to what it is now. The fenced-in, outdoor riding arena has a wheelchair ramp and seating for parents and siblings, all adjacent to the parking lot. There is also a picnic area, bonfire pit, a hay wagon that accommodates wheelchairs, and a small petting zoo. In 2010, a smaller second outdoor arena was added for an advanced riding program for children and young adults to learn independent riding skills. In 2010, with the addition of the second arena, we established our "Heroes on Horseback" program. MHR teamed up with the VA Medical Center and have made the commitment to bring these same benefits of Equine Assisted Therapy to our Veterans who have sacrificed so much to keep us safe. It is a small way of helping repay them for all they have given and all they may have lost.

Season statistics for the past years:

2005 – 1,075 hours of service were provided to the children. Volunteers donated 3,500 hours.

2006 – 1,603 hours of service were provided to 68 children. Volunteers contributed 5,159 hours in assisting these children with their therapy sessions. Another 1,408 hours of volunteer time were contributed in grounds maintenance and events. Another 110 children from various social service agencies enjoyed a fun day at the ranch.

2007 - 2,447 hours of therapy were received by 100 children, provided with the assistance of 117 volunteers. These volunteers gave 6,754 hours of their time to the program, while another 2,403 hours were dedicated by volunteers from various groups for ground maintenance and events.

2008 - MHR began charging a minimal fee to help support the program and care for the animals. For 2008, 81 children were active riders, and over 350 additional children combined to receive 2,964 hours of therapy. 5,840 hours were also donated to the Ranch by 161 volunteers.

2009 – 85 children were active riders, and over 200 additional children combined to receive 2,284 hours of therapy. 4,185 hours were also donated to the Ranch by 180 volunteers.

2010 – MHR had 95 riders in the Children’s program, including 9 that rode in our newly created independent riding program, for riders who had advanced beyond the level of the current riding program. 2010 also saw the beginning of our “Heroes on Horseback” Veteran’s program. Working in conjunction with the VA Medical Center, MHR started serving in-patients who had reached a level of recovery and were able to start rehabilitative riding sessions. Towards the end of the season we started working with outpatients referred by physical therapists and from the doctors who felt this type of therapy would be beneficial to their healing process. 15 veterans became involved with Majestic Hills and received therapy services that aligned with their injuries. Over 200 volunteers helped with all of the programs, including day camps for both Cornerstone and HopeKids, and put in 4,930 hours throughout the season.

2011 – 99 children participated in our program and 14 veteran had over 300 hours of equine assisted activities and therapies. We have 239 volunteers that helped throughout the year, and they put in 5,352 hours of service to our riders.

2012—78 Children and 24 veterans participated in the program. We had the assistance of over 288 volunteers that put in 7321 hours.

Building on the dream

The ranch is open from May 1 - October 31, weather permitting—which is why we envision the building of an indoor arena that would meet the needs of all of our riders. An indoor arena would let us hold classes in all but the most extreme weather as well as being able to extend our therapy services to our Veterans to be year round. Because we are one of the few facilities in the state that offers Therapeutic Riding and Equine Assisted Therapy to our disabled Veterans, having the ability to offer service throughout the year would decrease their rehabilitate time and increase the number of military men and women seen.

Conclusion

Our dream is a reality. We witness miracles every day of up-lifted spirits, increased self-esteem, and new found strengths. We hear from our riders’ parents and families, their therapists, physicians, advocates, teachers, and from the riders themselves about how they are reaching personal goals and gains. Our work can only continue with the shared effort of our community to provide education, therapy, and the development of youth and our Veterans.

Thanks go out to the following organizations that we work with: Courage Center, St. Paul Anger Management School, Eagan School of Autism, Dakota County ARC, Minneapolis VA Medical Center, MN State Academy for the Deaf, Tubman Family Alliance, Cornerstone, HopeKids, The Autism Society of Minnesota, Fairview University Hospital, NW Youth and Family Services, MN Teen Challenge, Mid West Challenge, Dakota and Scott County Corrections, and the Minnesota Veteran’s Homes—Minneapolis & Hastings. Majestic Hills will continue to try to reach as many children and young adults with special needs and Veterans in rehabilitation as possible and introduce them to the program and the services the ranch offers.