

Horses with Heart is Celebrating its 25th year of service to Yavapai County

Beginning in 1993 in the backyard of its founders with a dream to provide individuals with disabilities the opportunity to participate in therapeutic and recreational horsemanship along with their two horses and a few friends Horses with Heart (HwH) has grown. Today, located on a 5 acre facility in Chino Valley, AZ it serves the Community through 140+ volunteers, a herd of 15 equine and multiple programs providing these therapies and experiences to those with special needs from 4-84 as well as seniors and veterans. A member of PATH Intl, (Professional Association for Therapeutic Horsemanship) for most of its 25 years, HwH is well on its way to become a PATH Accredited Center (PAC) a level of achievement and commitment to excellence achieved by a small number of centers.

HwH through the work of its passionate and dedicated riding Director and Instructors all with multiple PATH, Int. certifications and credentials assist riders in fostering their confidence and dignity while challenging each rider to develop independent skills at their own level of ability. These possibilities include an autistic child unclenching his fist for the first time in order to pet his horse, a Veteran finally able to hoist herself onto a horse and a non-verbal child talking for the first time giving his horse the command "walk-on". These are profound moments all caused by the therapeutic relationship between the horse and rider.

The HwH Special Olympics Team had one of its riders selected for the SO World Games in Los Angeles, one of 10 special needs riders in the county. That young man on the autism spectrum had come a long way from his youth when he arrived clinging to his Grandmothers' skirt. He was named Captain of the team during training and went on to win a Gold & Bronze medal at the games. All this the result of the dedicated instructors and an army of volunteers over years at HwH along with a Community that has invested time and funding in this amazing organization.

Along with the Special Olympics program there are Therapeutic Horsemanship programs, Heroes & Horses a program for Veterans in conjunction with West Yavapai Guidance Clinic (www.wygc.com), Hippotherapy, a wonderful educational Marvelous Mini's outreach program, Silver Saddle program for Seniors and the Happy Trails Horse Experience, an annual Summer program that affords riders an opportunity to learn about horses from the ground up and offers sensory experiences that increase awareness and provides the participants with a sense of greater independence. Annually each June, on the first day of the World's Oldest Rodeo, Prescott Frontier Days, and in conjunction with their team and their Rodeo Royalty, Horses with Hearts Happy Hearts Rodeo provides a real rodeo experience to dozens of special needs youth. They have dinner with real cowboys and Rodeo Queens and then ride horses, rope the "woolly-bully", pin the tail of the sheep, learn roping from cowboys and participate in stick horse races and so much more. The Rodeos announcer announces them all and interviews them for the crowd. The kids are thrilled and the volunteers and audience are rarely are dry-eyed by the end of this event.

Most participants at the Center are scholarshipped in part or in the case of Veterans 100% through the dedicated fundraiser efforts of the Board & Staff along with long-term grantors plus business and independent donors along with a wonderful community providing thousands of hours of in-kind annually and their volunteer cadre with over 22,000 volunteer hours last year alone.

Horses with Heart is truly the place where "disabilities become possibilities".