



Annual Report

December 2019



281 Participants
116% increase



92% on
Scholarship



109 New Students
627% increase



147 in Groups
177% increase



6 School Classes
200% increase



28 Groundwork
Students



13 Program
Horses



332 Volunteers
26% increase

Free Rein's mission is to serve the community by strengthening the spirits, minds and bodies of children and adults through interaction with horses.



Who We Serve

Free Rein's participants are individuals facing physical, emotional or cognitive challenges. We serve a wide range of abilities and ages, the majority on the Autism Spectrum or with Cerebral Palsy or Down Syndrome. Our youngest is 3, our oldest is 68. Our age groups trend toward 6-10, 11-15 and 41-55. This year, we expanded our work with at-risk youth, adding school groups with behavior disorders like ADHD, Impulse Control, Anger and Anxiety. Our participants come from Transylvania, Henderson and Buncombe counties.

Students Transformed

Michelle Ridenour, EC teacher, Brevard Elementary

"Free Rein has made a huge impact on the lives of my students with disabilities. It is amazing to watch the transformation. They are happy, engaged, relaxed and flexible. I appreciate all of the hard work from the volunteers and workers. They are providing a much-needed program for my students. We are looking forward to participating in the spring session."



Celebrating Victories

Callan Pleasant, mother of Layken, age 3

"I'm not sure where to begin. Our daughter Layken has an ultra-rare non-inherited genetic disorder that affects her ability to walk and talk along with other normal daily tasks that are second nature to most. Layken also is overcome with anxiety that can sometimes be crippling. Free Rein has given her the opportunity to connect with others, her horse (she thinks she owns Mr. Pumpkin) and gain some verbal communication skills. Most children walk then talk. With a horse's gait so similar to the human gait, this stimulation has granted Layken the feeling of walking, thus propelling her speech. During the season, as Layken is allowed to ride, she speaks more and more. Her words are few but more understandable. This summer, she casually said 'Tonka,' her horse's name, during her session. Not milestones but inch-stones and they call for celebration."



Photo by Gloria Clouse

New Programs: SIBs and Say Whoa to Bullying

SIBs helps engage siblings of our participants on lesson days. Each week, we provide activities for siblings to do while our participants work with the horses. SIBs even includes a day for the sibling to learn to ride, with the teacher being the participant student.

Say Whoa to Bullying integrates lessons on verbal and nonverbal communication and how horses mirror human emotions, showing participants how bullying makes others feel. The 56 participants this year learned horsemanship skills, got to ride the horses and worked on team building. Thank you to the Transylvania Endowment Fund and the Sasser Family Foundation for providing funding for Say Whoa to Bullying.

Five community groups also spent time at Free Rein in 2019: 4H, Brevard College, Cindy Platt Boys & Girls Club, Rise & Shine and Camp Pisgah.



Goal Tracking

Over the last 18 months, Free Rein has started tracking session goals, which are determined by parents and instructors at the start of each session. They identify four goals for each 8-week session in these areas: physical, social, cognitive and horsemanship. Tracking is done three times during the session. At the end, results are noted in each student's evaluation. So far, "meets or exceeds goals" totals 544 out of 672 or 81% of goals achieved. Most of these achievements were in the physical category.



Summer Lessons

This summer, we added a second location at Mark and Susan Habel's farm (Masuha) on Davidson River Road in Pisgah Forest. They allowed us to use their five horses – Riley, Mini, Koda, Pearl and Guinness – in exchange for work and fence repair on their farm (with in-kind contributions from Builders First Source and a crew of volunteers). Our long-time site for summer lessons is Las Praderas on See Off Mountain. Having this second location helps to provide a break for the Rockbrook facility horses. Masuha also is more convenient for participants from TVS. Because of the additional location, we increased our summer capacity from 12 riders to 30. The Las Praderas location offered two 4-week sessions (doubling capacity from 12 to 24) and Masuha accommodated another 6 riders over 8 weeks.

PATH Int'l (Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International) is a federally registered 501(c3) nonprofit, formed in 1969 to promote safety and optimal outcomes in equine-assisted activities and therapies for individuals with special needs. Free Rein has been a PATH Certified Center since 2001.



Photo by Gloria Clouse

Our Staff

In late 2018, two year-round staff positions were added, Program Director (Brittany McCathern) and Program Administrator (Rachel Evans) both also instructors. In fall 2019, a fifth instructor, Allegra Guez, joined our team, that includes Kara McCarson and Mary Stoehr. Jennifer Rouse continues to act as Office Manager and Amberly Ralston is Horse Care Coordinator for Free Rein.



Sensory Trail

The trail opened March 4th, designed by instructors and built by volunteers. It is full of activities to engage students and provide new sensory inputs that the structured environment of the riding arena cannot. When students first come to Free Rein to ride, their senses can be overloaded by the smells, sounds, textures, new people and horses. Once the body becomes accustomed to the arena environment, instructors can add more sensory inputs in a controlled manner by using the Sensory Trail. Walking over the bridge, for example, brings in new sounds, uphill and downhill motions from the horse and stiffer movement as the horse walks on the hard surface. Being outside the arena walls, walking on uneven terrain, seeing the trees and grass and playing with enrichment tools are all major benefits our participants get from the Sensory Trail.



Miracles Every Day

Cathy Murawski, volunteer since 2012

"Picture a beautiful place in the mountains where little miracles happen every day. Where abilities, not disabilities, are foremost. Where, once you enter the gate, you have reached your happy place.

This is certainly true for me. These are some of the little miracles I have witnessed over the years:

A young man who was nonverbal says his first "Walk on" and "Whoa." Now he's a regular chatterbox.

A girl who is blind and who we were told was not social. Now, what a delight to walk through the barn with her hands on my shoulders, with her singing "The Name Game" and "Amazing Grace."

The young man who was so determined to ride that he lost nearly 100 pounds.

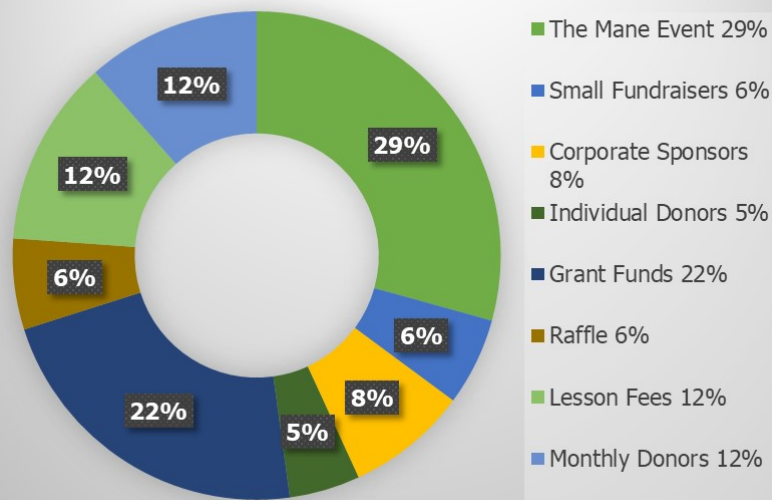
A young woman with deafness, who has been with us for years, who went from refusing to touch a horse to now eagerly working to halter, groom and tack and even offering the horse a kiss.

Our real daily miracles are our loving horses. What joy you give me and our riders.

To all involved with this happy place, thank you, because you have done more for me than I can ever do for you. I feel blessed to call Free Rein family."



Income



Annual Sponsor Growth

In 2019, sponsor dollars increased by \$5,500 year over year. That included 20 in the Copper category (with 14 new sponsors) and our first Platinum level sponsor.

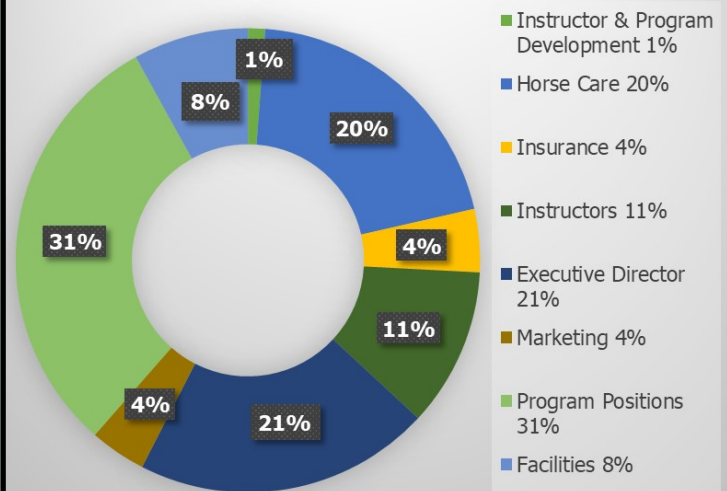


2019 Annual Budget

INCOME: In 2019, Free Rein's total operating budget was about \$196,000. The graph above shows the income distribution. The annual "Mane Event" fundraising gala in the fall remains the chief source of income, followed by Grant funds. Four other events were scheduled April through August (Cookout at Food Matters, Derby Party at Connetsee Falls, Rodeo/Cornhole at Oskar Blues, and Par for the Horse at Sherwood Forest Golf Club). Ride On! Day Camp offered riding lessons to able-bodied students during the summer. Our annual Halloween Barn, focused on giving back to the community, raised \$300, though not intended to be a fundraiser.

EXPENSES: The graph to the right represents costs for 2019, with the largest expense for staff. Horse care costs are the second largest expense (our equine staff). Rockbrook Camp continues to be a good partner for Free Rein, providing space for our programs September through May. We appreciate them so much.

How We Spend Money



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Raising Money for Scholarships

A new fundraising effort this year focused specifically on raising money for student scholarships (Therapeutic Riding Scholarship Fund). Everyone involved with Free Rein was encouraged to sell \$5 raffle tickets with four day passes to Dollywood as the prize. The winner was announced at "The Mane Event." More than \$9,000 was raised, representing funding for 20.5 scholarships for students who qualify. We plan to do another raffle in 2020.




Halloween Barn 2019

In 2019, Free Rein launched a new website, redesigned its brochures and stickers and updated other marketing materials to better support our brand and program development.

Managing Growth

This year has been a year of tremendous growth for Free Rein. Although we are excited about that, we must also be cautious. There are several factors to be considered in scheduling our programs. They include horses, instructors, volunteers, barn, pastures and, of course, funding.

PATH standards dictate how many hours per day/week a horse can be worked. The size of the barn, number of stalls and available pasture determine how many horses can be part of our programs. The number of instructors and their available hours influence how many classes can be scheduled. We require an exceptional number of volunteers throughout each week to assist with classes, horse care and other activities. We could not do what we do without our volunteers. Last, funding. As a nonprofit, Free Rein's revenues come from individual donations, grants, fundraising events and annual corporate sponsorships. We receive 12% of our annual budget from lesson fees. Our costs include instructor fees, horse care and feeding, tack and supplies, farrier and veterinary costs, leasing of facility from Rockbrook for 9 months, instructor materials, classroom materials and other program equipment and supplies.



THE MANE EVENT

"The Mane Event" is our annual fundraising gala in October. This year's gala raised nearly \$50,000 to pay for operational expenses and student scholarships. More than 200 people attended the event on Oct. 19th at Connestee Falls clubhouse. It featured again a Western theme of "trail ride." This year, during the live auction, Zoey the Pony came out to help raise money for "Feed My Friends" at the barn. Gala co-chairs were board members Donna Hunter, Denise Stretcher and Nancy Waclawek. Save the date for next year: October 17th at Connestee Falls. Will Zoey show up again?

Full Circle

What happens when you give from the heart? That generosity circles right back to you.

This story of heartfelt giving starts with six artists from Transylvania Vocational Services. They and others from TVS have been coming to Free Rein for lessons since 2012.

Sam Snyder, Kristen Hodsdon, Heather Turner, John Marshall, Ryan Rupp and Jewell Stutzman wanted to contribute to "The Mane Event." They created a mixed-media painting for the live auction: "This piece was inspired by the fun and freedom that Free Rein provides for us each season." They incorporated elements that made them think of Free Rein – sand (for the dusty ground), corn (a horse snack) and feathers (representing the outdoors and "the feeling of flying that we get from our horses.")

Their donation touched the heart of another artist, Nancy E. Richards of Brevard, whose work is featured at Number 7 Arts gallery in downtown Brevard. When she saw the painting in the live auction, Richards decided she had to have it.

On Nov. 11, in a letter to the Opinion page of the *Transylvania Times*, Richards wrote: "As an artist, I was amazed when I saw the horse painting. Its vibrant colors and energy really tell a compelling story ... What a wonderful collaboration it is to see the Free Rein program helping and serving these folks (from TVS) and to see them, in turn, helping and serving Free Rein!"

The story of what happened next appeared in the Nov. 21st edition of the *Times*. Richards donated the painting back to TVS.

Richards said she "wanted TVS to know that your program is working and making our community better, and I wanted your participants to know that they are talented artists who are able to make change with their work."

The painting now hangs in the TVS lobby with the artists' signatures and a copy of Richards' letter to the *Times*.

Nancy Richards with the TVS painting.
Photo courtesy of TVS.



Meet Our Newest Therapy Horses



Moose joined Free Rein's herd of therapy horses in Fall 2019. He is an 18-year-old Welsh Pony that was donated to Rockbrook Camp. Moose's short stature and small build make him a great size for younger riders. Because of his many years as a lesson pony, Moose is ideal for Free Rein because nothing fazes him. He takes care of his riders, no matter their riding abilities.

Toby, a seasoned therapy pony, joined Free Rein in Fall 2019. He was given to Rockbrook Camp by his previous owner after spending many summers as a Rockbrook Camp pony, his "off season" from St. Andrew University's Therapeutic Riding Program. Toby is a 21-year-old Haflinger who loves being lazy. His short, sturdy build make him great for smaller riders and his waddle-like gait is ideal for riders with low muscle tone. Toby is very laid back and is a perfect therapy horse for any ability level.



Dakoda is the newest member of the herd. A 20-year-old Quarter Horse, Dakoda has spent most of his career as a camp horse here in Brevard. Dakoda has a sturdy yet slimmer build that makes him ideal for medium riders. His smooth movements are great for a rider with high-tone muscles. Dakoda has seen and done it all, giving him the right confidence and attitude for therapeutic riding. His training and time as a camp horse make him great with beginners and more advanced riders.

Upcoming Events

Week of Dec. 16th	Make-up Week Second Fall Session
Fri., Jan. 10th	Spring Session Sign-up Deadline
Fri. Jan. 17th	<i>Bond with Your Horse</i> Clinic for Horse Leaders
Fri., Jan. 31st	Spring Session Paperwork Deadline
Sat., Feb. 15th	Volunteer Orientation
Week of Feb. 24th	Parent Orientation Week
Mon., Feb. 24th, Tues., Feb. 25th & Wed., Feb. 26th	Sensory Training—Required for all Lesson Volunteers
Week of Mar. 2nd	First Week Spring Session



Ride On! Day Camp



This summer, Free Rein held its first day camp for able-bodied children ages 6-13. It ran Monday-Friday from 9 a.m. to noon. Campers learned horsemanship and riding skills. This camp also introduced Free Rein to a new demographic and connected us with potential donors, supporters and volunteers.



In 2020, we will offer Ride On! Day Camp from August 3rd-7th at Las Praderas. Only 10 slots are available. The cost of \$400 per rider includes riding, horse care, trail rides and horsing around! Look for information about registration in January. Children of volunteers receive a \$50 discount. Call for more information.

Lacey & Buddy—A Huge Loss

In 1992, Jerry Stone purchased several Connemara Ponies for the Rockbrook Camp summer riding program. Among them were Buddy and Lacey, who were only 2 to 3 years old when they arrived. At Rockbrook Camp, the young ponies learned how to become equine instructors for all levels of riders. During the school year, the ponies spent their time teaching children of all ages to ride at McNair's Country Acres in Raleigh. They were nearly always together.

In 2010, Free Rein relocated to Rockbrook, and Buddy and Lacey soon became valuable members of our Therapy Herd. They now were equestrian instructors year-round and could stay in their true home here in Brevard. During their 28 years at Rockbrook, the bond between Lacey and Buddy continued to grow. Their connection became so strong that everybody who worked with them noticed it.

In the Spring of 2019, Lacey's health started to decline. As her health issues progressed, Buddy demonstrated empathetic behaviors that led to his rapid decline. On their last day, they were in the pasture side by side. Lacey decided she was ready to go. She kept lying down and getting up from the ground, restless and uncomfortable. Buddy, never far away, began to pace back and forth. As Lacey lay down for the last time, Buddy lay down, too. They peacefully passed within moments of each other in March 2019.



Volunteers — We can't do what we do without you. Thank you all!

Ruth Allen
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Margo Baron
Nancy Beale
Whitney Bell
Patti Black
Susan Boler
Katie Bolton
Cristi Boost
Roger Boost
April Breedlove
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Photo by Gloria Clouse

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Ally Martin
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Tim Masterson
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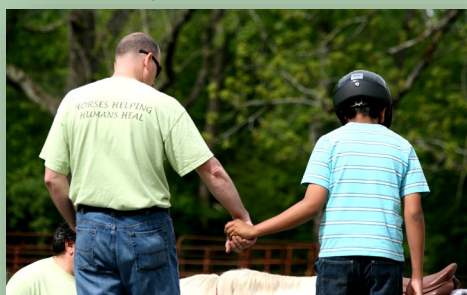
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