



Annual Report

December 2020



Free Rein in Historical Perspective

Free Rein was born twenty years ago when a couple of local women decided to dream big and bring together our devotion to horses and our professional work as healers. One of us, Maureen McManus, was an acupuncturist. I am an Episcopal priest. Earlier in the summer, my life partner Sue Sasser and I had bought a small horse farm, the Stables at Las Praderas, which we wanted to put to use for community service, perhaps to bring together people with special needs and horses who could help them. With this in mind, our neighbor Maureen McManus and I invited a group of interested persons – a couple of riding instructors, a physical therapist, an occupational therapist, a psychotherapist, a physician, a lawyer, an accountant, several parents of children with special needs, and people willing to loan us their horses – to form our first board of directors in September 2000.

The board's first task was to choose a name for our therapeutic riding center. "Free Rein" sprang to mind as a whimsical image for the freedom we were confident our students could find in relation to their horse-helpers. The board's next task was to apply for our 501c3 tax-exempt status as a non-profit organization, which enabled us to begin to raise money and eventually become sustainable.

By far the most exciting moment for Free Rein's early leadership was the day in the fall of 2000 when we held our first lesson: an 8 year old girl on the autism spectrum, whose mother became our first board Chair; a gentle old quarter-horse, "Señor Sanro," retired son of the star of a "Black Beauty" film; a side-walker; a horse-leader; and a local riding instructor who was serving on Free Rein's board, all working together in the arena at the Stables at Las Praderas, a few miles up the mountain from Rockbrook



Free Rein's first lesson in 2000

Camp, the place Free Rein would land in 2011 as a long-term home.

During the twenty years since that first memorable lesson, Free Rein has served over 500 students, some who began with us as young children and are now with us as young adults. More than 60 horses, over 1000 volunteers, and at least 25 PATH-certified instructors, have worked in our classes. Approximately 20 staff members (executive and program directors, volunteer coordinators, and office managers) and 50 board members, including six Chairs, have offered their best talents to building and strengthening Free Rein programmatically and financially.

For the first seven years, Free Rein held its classes at the Stables at Las Praderas, at the top of See Off Mountain, where it has continued to hold a small summer program. Seeking a site that would be more accessible to greater numbers of people, Free Rein explored the feasibility of two sites – in Etowah and Mills River – for its classes between 2007-2009. In 2009, Free Rein was invited to use

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

Free Rein's Vision is to provide interactive horse-human experiences to an inclusive community which enrich life skills, promote personal well-being and build lasting relationships.

Free Rein's Values
We offer a positive experiential, collaborative environment that heals and cares for our community, participants and horses through mutual respect, positive atmosphere and personal growth.



Spring Lessons Suspended, But Horses Kept Staff Busy

In February, volunteers participated in orientation and special clinics to be prepared for the session. In “Bond with Your Horse,” horse leaders learned how to be more in control of the horse in a therapeutic setting. All volunteers participated in a “Sensory Training” that helped them understand better what their students experience during a lesson. The exercise involved dealing with obstacles to visual and auditory processing, physical impairments, verbal communication, and fine and gross motor functions.

After the quiet winter months, the horses and staff looked forward to greeting riders and volunteers on March 2. Classes took place for two weeks until Gov. Roy Cooper ordered the closure of schools and non-essential businesses

on March 14 because of the pandemic. Free Rein had a record-breaking enrollment for the spring session and an increased pool of volunteers to be side walkers and horse leaders.

Even though spring riding lessons were suspended, the 12 therapy horses that are integral to Free Rein’s programs were cared for every day by a small crew of staff and volunteers, following CDC guidelines for social distancing. Barn chores were done every morning and evening and horses were exercised and turned out to graze, normal chores during a very abnormal time.



Back in the Saddle, Fall 2020

When health and government officials announced permission to return to more normal social activities in August, Free Rein began to saddle up and get going again. With most of our participants being autoimmune compromised, we slowly reopened, taking measures to ensure we were following guidelines, keeping everyone’s health and wellness our top priority.

General Guidelines:

Before entering the facility, participants, staff and volunteers undergo daily health screenings and temperature checks at the check-in table. Masks are required for everyone. Only horse leaders are permitted in the barn to groom and tack their horses. Students do not prepare their own horses for lessons. This is huge change for us. Grooming has been a key aspect and crucial part of our lesson as it is how the horse/human connection is established. The same volunteers remain for the two lessons each day to minimize the amount of foot traffic on and off the property. After every lesson, all commonly touched surfaces, saddle covers, and props are cleaned and sanitized. Everyone promptly leaves after their scheduled time to allow for proper sanitation.

As we progress through lessons, we continually monitor health concerns and risks for our participants,

staff and volunteers to determine further phase progression.

Phase One - Free Rein offered two lessons a day, with a maximum of two students per lesson. Phase one was for our independent participants with the lowest volunteer need requiring only a horse leader.

Phase Two - Serving individuals with minimal assistance needed, with one horse leader and one side walker.

Phase Three - Lessons for participants with maximum assistance needed, one horse leader and two side walkers. We will also be opening up lessons for our ground school program, which consists of our participants who do not participate in the mounted lesson and only groom.

Where we are now:

We opened our fall session on September 14 with 14 participants. This was not even a fraction of our normal number of participants. We began Phase Two, the week of October 12. We will move to Phase Three if our health risks remain stable.



2020

Where We've Been, What We've Done, and Where We're Going

Jerry Clouse, Board Chair, Free Rein Center

Sunrise on Friday, October 27, 2000, was at 7:48 AM. The weather forecast for Cedar Mountain was for a sunny day with an expected high of 75 degrees. A historic event was about to happen that would forever change the lives of Transylvania County children with developmental, emotional and physical challenges. Articles of Incorporation for a new non-profit organization were filed at 10:09 AM. with the North Carolina Secretary of State. The organization filing those articles was Free Rein and a vitally needed community resource was born.

Free Rein was looking forward to celebrating 20 years in existence this year. 2020 was anticipated to be our most successful year. We had a full complement of 5 certified instructors, a list of 200 volunteers and over 120 students anxious to begin their riding experience with 12 therapy horses. We were very enthusiastic as we looked forward to conducting innovative programs with school groups as well as enhanced activities with the Wounded Warrior Program. Then COVID-19 invaded our lives and everything good came to a halt.

We shut down operations on March 16, following the action of Transylvania County Schools, and spent the ensuing months writing new policies and procedures for our planned reopening. All the new policies were written in compliance with recommendations from the CDC and the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services. While monitoring the pandemic situation in the State, and especially in Transylvania County, we were obligated to protect the integrity of our program, sustain the health of our 12 equine therapy partners and ensure a safe environment for our volunteers and staff. Free Rein has been able to sustain operations, keep all staff



employed and maintain fiscal viability through prudent utilization of scarce resources. The herd of horses has remained healthy and has been exercised on a regular basis. Revenue lost from a lack of operations had to be replaced. Grants received from service clubs, churches, family grants, and the Federal Government (Paycheck

Protection Plan & Small Business Administration)

allowed us to maintain stability. However, the key to the survival of Free Rein during this dark time has been the support and generosity of our loving Free Rein family of parents, volunteers, donors, board of directors members, local business sponsors and staff. We are still in business because this loyal group of supporters wanted our mission of "serving the community by strengthening the spirits, minds and bodies of children and adults through interaction with horses," to continue. We know you take significant consideration in where you invest your money. In return, you can have confidence that we steward your donation with care for lasting impact and organizational stability. Free Rein looks forward, with cautious optimism, to fully fulfilling its mission in 2021.

Moving forward, our Fall session opened on September 14. The first two phases were gradual – phasing into operations while we evaluated our new policies and procedures and monitored the status of COVID-19 in our community. The 17 participants in those sessions were those requiring minimal assistance and were recognized as the lowest health risks. All recommendations have been followed exactly, including the wearing of masks, washing of hands, social distancing between individuals and the thorough cleaning of tack and other surfaces. Phase 3 lessons began for 15 participants requiring the maximum assistance of one horse leader and two side walkers. Our programs will slowly continue to build as long as the health of participants, staff and volunteers remains steady.

The words of Thomas Merton, a 20th century French writer, poet and theologian, accurately describe Free Rein's journey in 2020. Merton stated, "You do not need to know precisely what is happening or exactly where it is all going. What you need is to recognize the possibilities and challenges offered by the present moment and to embrace them with courage, faith and hope."

My fellow board members and I are honored and humbled to oversee this remarkable community legacy, simply called Free Rein. We are blessed.

Our participants, volunteers, horses and staff are thrilled to be back in the saddle and together again!





HEROS Program

Helping Equines Reconnect Our Spirits

Horse Adoption Program:

Our herd consists of hard-working equines that change lives one hoof beat at a time. They require a considerable amount of love and care to keep them in optimal working condition to best serve our participants.

Our annual cost for horse care is about \$38,000. We developed this program to help offset the costs associated with taking care of our therapy partners.

We hope to have 2 to 3 HEROS for each horse.



Cassie's Retirement

Congratulations, Cassie, on your retirement! She retired to Sugarbrush Farm on See Off Mountain in September. Cassie had been with Free Rein since 2013 and had shown her dedication to our students by participating in countless lessons for the last seven years.



Financial Reports - 2020 ANNUAL BUDGET

Income: The Free Rein income budget for 2020 was \$179,300. **Expense:** The expense budget for 2020 was \$176,272.

Free Rein began the year full of excitement and anticipation. January and February were trotting along, right on target, meeting all budget projections. But when the Coronavirus infected the country, Free Rein followed the action of the Transylvania County School System and shut down operations, thus eliminating all revenue from operations. We remained shut down until September 14th. Having no students to instruct did not mean having no expenses to pay. Our 12 trained equine therapy partners still required care and feeding. Even though we reduced payroll slightly, we continued to need people to tend the herd.

The accompanying graphs show our 2020 income and expense distribution. Rockbrook Camp continues

to be a good partner for Free Rein, providing space for our programs, September through May. We greatly appreciate them.

Now, 10 months after it closed, Free Rein has no loans or debt and is paying all of its bills on time. This could not have been accomplished without the tremendous financial support from our Free Rein family of sponsors, volunteers, donors and parents. We were also able to procure several small and medium grants from private foundations, community foundations, service clubs and family foundations. We also received a Paycheck Protection Program grant from the Federal Government that protected our staff.

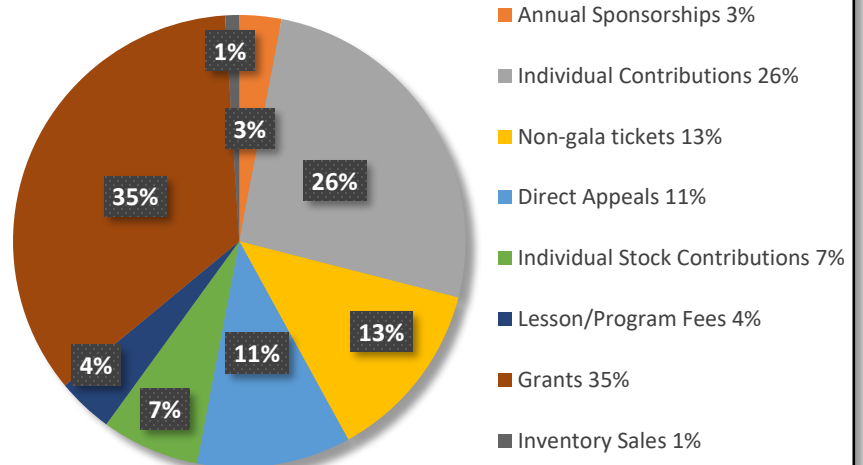
How You Can Help Free Rein

Free Rein counts on the generosity of our business sponsors and individual donors to fund our organization. The money goes to keeping our horses healthy and our riding programs affordable for families. Help us continue to serve the community by becoming a donor. You can sponsor a horse through our HEROS program or make a one-time or continuing contribution. Visit our website, www.freereincenter.org, to learn more, or call our office at 828-883-3375. Free Rein Center is an IRS-approved not-for-profit organization. Our tax ID number is 31-1740563. Thank you for your consideration.

2020 Board of Directors

Jerry Clouse, Board Chair
Linda Felderhoff, Vice-Chair
Nancy Waclawek, Secretary
Andy Bullwinkel
Rev. Sharad Creasman
Debi Garrett
Jim Garrett
Carter Heyward
Donna Hunter
Susan Kish
Porsha Smith
Denise Stretcher

Income



Expenses

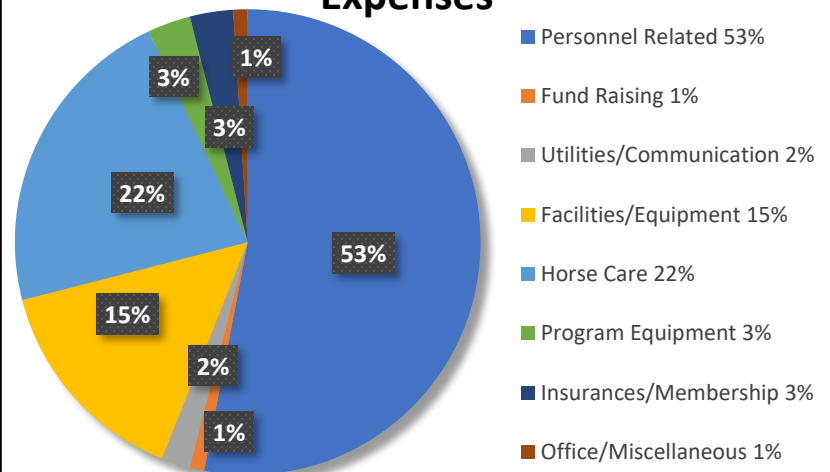
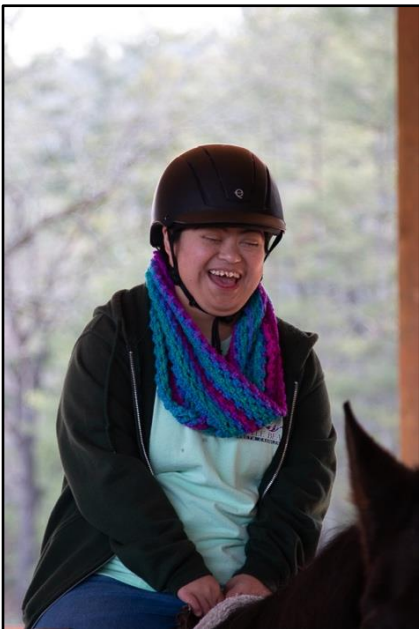


Photo Gallery

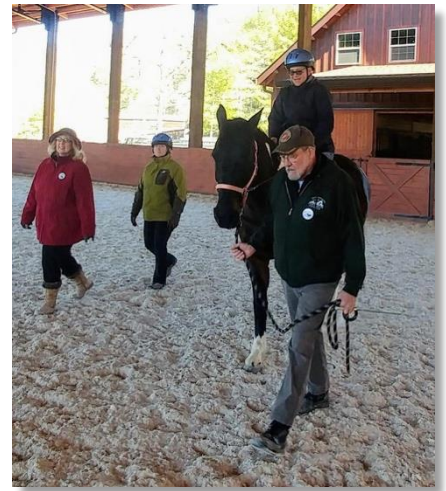




Many thanks to Gloria Clouse for her contribution of time and talent by providing photography to Free Rein.

Wounded Warrior Project

Free Rein and Project Odyssey in Asheville partnered in February 2020 for an incubator program to provide equine-assisted learning to 11 participants. Horses can be beneficial to the mental and physical well-being of humans, and they provide a way for people to connect to nature. Therapy horses also can help individuals with every-day life skills and with rehabilitation. During their visit, the Warriors learned about herd behavior and dynamics and horse interaction. They also learned proper equine care and grooming before a mounted lesson. For some of the Warriors, it was a refresher course and a nostalgic moment to be reunited with horses. For others, it was a new accomplishment getting on or being around a horse for the first time. Free Rein and Project Odyssey hope to continue the Wounded Warrior Project in the future, as community health conditions allow.



Reunited



The afternoon of Friday, October 2, 2020 marked the end of an era. Rockbrook lost the last member of the Connemara herd, known as Danny. He joined the rest of his friends on the other side of the Rainbow Bridge. Just when we

thought it was strange only having you, you showed us just how strange it is without you. About 28 years ago, when Danny was 4, camp owners Townsend and Jerry Stone received word that a Connemara farm in Georgia had too many ponies and were cleaning out, with plans to start over with a smaller herd. The camp owners loaded up and drove to the farm, purchasing 30 ponies. There were 15 for Camp High Rocks and 15 for Rockbrook. The ponies were

brought to Cedar Mountain in big trucks, in the dark of the night and rain, where all 30 of them were unloaded. Townsend, owner of High Rocks Camp, stated, "None of them were broke and watching all 30 of them unload off of the trailer was a sight." Each of the ponies was very different in their own ways, but if you knew Danny, you loved him, even though his (sometimes) naughty pony self made it difficult. Watching him teach little girls how to ride was priceless and we will forever be thankful for being blessed enough to be able to teach those lessons with all four of the Connemaras. We know the four of you guys are having a blast being together again as much as it hurts without you. So, enjoy it. Run, buck and kick up your heels like you guys did down here. Make up for all the time you spent apart. We love you and you are already so missed but knowing that you, Annie, Lacey and Buddy are back together somehow makes it feel ok.





Parent Story

Our six-year-old son, Kei, struggles with sensory processing disorder, ADHD and anxiety that make regulating his emotions and behaviors very challenging. Of all the therapies that we've done - and we've done a lot! - therapeutic riding has shown the biggest and most immediate benefit. It has helped him learn to regulate his emotions and behaviors, increased his awareness of others, increased his coordination, and given a huge boost to his self-confidence. We are so grateful for the work of all the staff and volunteers at Free Rein - and of course his trusty steed, Mr. Pumpkin! We would not be where we are today without this amazing program.

Welcome Pokey Joe

Free Rein welcomed a new member to the herd in April 2020: Pokey Joe, the Equicizer. The mechanical wooden horse made by the Wooden Horse Corp. in Norwalk, Ohio, is used to help students to gain confidence on horseback, to improve fitness and riding skills and to train volunteers during orientation. Pokey Joe is working hard this fall helping students improve their riding skills. Instructors find that the Equicizer helps in a variety of ways, including teaching students mounting and dismounting techniques, strengthening core muscles, overcoming fears and anxieties about being around a horse, helping to evaluate potential students and helping students get within Free Rein's weight limit to ride. The Equicizer was purchased through grant money awarded by an Asheville family foundation. The grant also allowed for the purchase of a new Kawasaki Mule from Dal-Kawa of Hendersonville, one of Free Rein's sponsors.



Our 2020 Gala had to be canceled, but we look forward to celebrating in 2021.

Save the Date!

Saturday, October 16, 2021

**Free Rein will be celebrating
20 years of service at
The Mane Event in the fall of 2021.
Hope you can join us!**

Volunteer Spotlight

First of all, we want to say “Thank You” to all of our volunteers. Volunteers are an invaluable resource to our organization due to the various roles they are able to play. Some of our volunteers have dedicated several years of service to the organization, while others may participate in one-time projects. Without volunteers, our program would not exist.

This year we would like to dedicate our volunteer spotlight to Cathy Murawski and Andy Bullwinkel.

Cathy Murawski recently moved to the coast of NC after volunteering with Free Rein from 2012 to 2020. Cathy was drawn into Free Rein at a festival event where we were recruiting volunteers. She has been



a year-round volunteer who faithfully came every Tuesday and Thursday. Every year, Cathy would volunteer about 510 hours, working with the school groups, individuals in lessons, groundwork lessons, horse leading, side walking, volunteer training, barn work and anything else that needed doing. As Cathy said, “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. To all involved with this happy place, thank you, because you have done more for me than I ever do for you. I feel blessed to call Free Rein family.” Free Rein feels blessed to have all of you to call family as well.

Andy Bullwinkel has been a part of our organization since 2013. Andy was drawn to our

program through an article in the local newspaper. Andy said, “I liked the idea of a short-term volunteer commitment at the beginning, 8 weeks. The program also offered flexibility in choosing the times for me to commit. In the beginning this was crucial, as I was a teacher. What I like now is that the staff at Free Rein are upbeat, positive and express their appreciation often. The families and participants are welcoming, appreciative and supportive of our involvement. Free Rein offers a healthy outdoor opportunity to volunteers with a mild amount of physical activity.”

Andy is what you would call a “jack of all trades” who works tirelessly in many capacities. He is always willing to take on what would seem to some as daunting tasks. Sometimes he takes on a task we did not even know needed to be addressed. He is always one step ahead of us in helping to maintain a safe working environment for horse and human. Andy typically volunteers about 340 hours a year. During this time, you can find him at the crack of dawn bringing in the horses, helping with horse care in bad weather, subbing in lessons as a horse leader or side walker, schooling or training horses and much more.



Andy always comes to the barn with lots of wonderful ideas and always brings a great positive, cheerful vibe with him. We always look forward to seeing him and appreciate Andy working with us.



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.



Volunteers – We can't do what we do without YOU! Thank you all!

Abigail Malmin	Claire Martin	Jane Holland	Kayla Kiley	Rich Warwick
Alane Klink	Clint Jergensen	Jane Huffine	Ken Klink	Richard Evans
Amber Culleton	Connie Chase	Janet Howser	Kevin Felderhoff	Rodge Livengood
Andy Bullwinkel	Crystal Hooper	Janet Pierce	Kinlee Miller	Rose Franks
Anka Metcalf	Deb Bridges	Janice Hiner	Laura Clark	Ruth Allen
Austin McCall	Debi Garrett	Jennifer Stewart	Laura Dewitt	Sabrina Ortiz
Barbara Odom	Dee Charlaron	Jeremy Stewart	Lesley McLachlan	Sam Whitmire
Bill Huffman	Diane Brown	Jeri Murphy	Leta McDonald	Samuel Arnal
Birdeah Masterson	Donna Huffman	Jerry Clouse	Linda Camp	Sara Sprinkle
Bob Euneman	Eleonore LeBoulenge	Jim Goar	Linda Felderhoff	Sarah Malmin
Bunny Goar	Elisabeth Illg-Reyes	Jody Ralston	Lisa Conner	Sarah Tomaka
Carey Andrews	Ella Lewinson	John Bridges	Lisa Thompson	Scott Garrett
Carole Oosting	Ellen Ramsay	John Colflesh	Lorraine Rourke	Sherry Downing
Cate Prince	Eric Schwalber	John Schommer	Lynn Weisberg	Smoot William
Catherine Daley	Estrella Sheehan	John Turner	"Mac" Linda McGuffin	Sue Pare
Cathy Murawski	Fiona Carreira	Judd Ostrom	Madison Jones	Tim Masterson
Celia Trembulak	Frank Kralik	Judi Weeter	Marjorie Brockway	Toni Garrett
Cheryl Calvert	Gale Dazzo	Judy McCathern	Marley Stewart	Wendy Pick
Christina Blum	Gaye Owen	Judy Patrick	Mundy Neale	Wendy Teitsma
Christine Mellon	Gillian Greenwood	Judy Widlowski	Patti Black	Wendy Warwick
Chuck Coomer	Gloria Clouse	Karen Shank	Paul Mellon	Whitney Bell
Cindy Broadhead	Gordon Neale	Karen Smith	Penny Lundgren	
Cindy Eaton	Greg McCathern	Kathie Briola	Porsha Smith	
Cindy Lester	Helen Ostrom	Katie Bolton	Rachel Pruitt	
Cindy Wilson	Janna Carlson	Katie Franks	Rebekah Lineberger	

Continued from front page

a pasture, paddock, and barn on Barclay Road. Believing we had found a long-term home, we built a small office building and a small riding arena. Two years later, however, we had to move when the owners of the land decided to sell. At this point, Jeff and Sarah Carter, owners of Rockbrook Camp, invited us to use the facilities of their camp. Free Rein has been working at Rockbrook for the past nine years, grateful to the Carters and their staff for their generosity and partnership. Since 2018, Free Rein has benefitted enormously from the use of Rockbrook Camp's world-class covered arena, which enables us to hold lessons rain or shine, an asset in Brevard's rainy weather.

From the beginning, Free Rein has been the beneficiary of gifts in many kinds from people and organizations in and beyond Transylvania County. For example, one of our first supporters was "Mountin' Hopes" in Mars Hill, the only other certified therapeutic riding center in western NC at the time. Mountin' Hopes staff were generous beyond measure in helping Free Rein's early board and staff begin to understand how to put together a

therapeutic riding program. Another organization, the "Above and Beyond" classical riding academy in Hendersonville, donated a year's worth of hay to our horses. Year after year, local businesses have served as sponsors, and hundreds of individuals have given generously of their time, talents, treasure, and in-kind offerings such as horses, farrier and veterinary care, tack, carpentry, painting, and IT skills.

Looking back, we are amazed at how Free Rein has become stronger both programmatically and financially. We are proud that, increasingly over the past few years, we have been shining bright as a community resource with high name-recognition in Transylvania and neighboring counties. Thanks to the generosity of our donors and the enthusiastic efforts of our board and staff, instructors and volunteers, horses and students, and Rockbrook Camp, Free Rein has become a first-rate therapeutic riding center, beyond its founders' wildest dreams.

Carter Heyward

August 31, 2020

**Thank you to all our sponsors and donors for supporting Free Rein.
Without you we could not do the work of changing lives, one hoof beat at a time.**

Lisa Patty Abbey
Amazon Smile
Elizabeth Annable
Gerry Azzata
Benevity
Don Bieger
Big Frog Custom T-Shirts &
More of Asheville
Susan Bir
Blue Moon Art Gallery
Peggy Bogardus
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Brevard Insurance
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Lake Toxaway Charities
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Alicia Llineberger
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C. Heideman Miller
Don & Dori Miller
Georgia Minnich
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Mountain Bizworks
Rhae Mozley
Steve Muench
Napa Auto Parts
Network for Good
Ray Norris
Jim Null
Barbara Odom
Brenda Ofiesh
Lyn French O'Hare
Lane Oliver
Bryan O'Neill
Carole & Tom Oosting
Judd Ostrom
Sharon Pastorino
Judy Patrick
Pelletier Forge & Farrier
PepsiCo
Sara Pick
Fred & Janet Pierce
Pisgah Forest Rotary
Phyllis Plotnick
Doug Poad
Jacqueline Preis
Anne Monique Ransdell
Gwendolen Reyes-Illg
Devan Riess
Riversong Veterinary Clinic
Rockbrook Camp for Girls
Rogow Family Fund
Leah Rosenheck
Judith Rossner
Lorraine Rourke
Dawn Rouse
Jennifer Rouse
Robert Rupp

Sacred Heart
Catholic Church
Sasser Family Foundation
Susan Sasser
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Leslie Wingard
Frank & Marian Wolf
Women of St. Philips
Women's Workshop of
Sherwood Forest
Charles Yoder
Elizabeth York
Linda Young

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.

Free Rein Center for Therapeutic Riding and Education – P.O. Box 1325 – Brevard, NC 28712 – (828)883-3375 – FreeReinCenter.org