



Nickers & News

Summer 2025



Message from the Chair

Susan Kish, Board Chair, Free Rein Center

What is Therapeutic Riding and how does it work? A question I was asked recently which made me think perhaps many of us have not had the opportunity to experience equine therapy.

My personal experience as an able-bodied rider has been with my own horses as well as my experience with the Free Rein Center. I have found that even though I might start my ride with a thousand 'things that need to get done' or anxiety about something in the news, being on my horse compels me to stay in the present. A horse can sense your mood – whether calm or uneasy and adjusts his/her behavior to you. This forces the rider to appreciate the calming gait of the horse. I can feel myself relax and even my muscles start to feel better. The worries give way to a peaceful state of mind. My not so joking saying about riding is that 'when I smell like a horse, I know I've had a good day'.

In the world of therapeutic riding, the standard answer to what is accomplished goes along the lines of therapeutic riding offers a range of benefits for individuals with various needs, in areas of physical, cognitive, emotional, and social well-being. It can improve physical skills like balance, coordination, and strength, while also nurturing cognitive skills like concentration and attention span. It also can boost emotional well-being by increasing confidence, self-

esteem, and social skills.

There are many advantages to therapeutic riding, including physical, emotional, and psychological benefits. As Kathleen Salas, PT, MHA, a Mass General Brigham

physical therapist explains, "During a session, riders are stretching, warming up, and moving in different directions to stimulate muscles and build strength, endurance, and coordination, in addition to walking at different paces and terrain with their horse...Perched atop a horse, riders must engage muscles in their abdomen, back, and pelvis to stabilize their trunk and maintain posture."

At the Free Rein Center, we continuously see the horse and rider become a team. This fosters the opportunity for our student to develop the kind of communication skills, trust, and accomplishment that go beyond the barn. The connection between the horse and the student promotes respect and confidence while the gentle loving nature of the horse lessens anxiety and fear. Many of our lessons are group lessons, which provide social interactions with other students, and opportunities to learn from watching others. All this is taken with the student into their daily living setting.



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.

As a rider I have always felt blessed to be accepted by a horse. I sense when I watch Free Rein's lessons that feeling is felt by our instructors, volunteers and our students. It is a privilege to be helped by a horse.

I hope this message has answered the question for those who have not had the experience of a horse and for those of us who have that familiarity to reflect on how important equine therapy is and how fortunate this community is to have the Free Rein Center for Riding and Education.

I leave you with the poem "I Saw a Child" by John Anthony Davies:

*I saw a child, who couldn't walk, sit on a horse, laugh and talk.
Then ride it through a field of daisies and
yet he could not walk unaided.
I saw a child, no legs below, sit on a horse and make it go.
Through woods of green and places he had never been;
to sit and stare, except from a chair.
I saw a child who could only crawl mount a horse and sit up tall.
Put it through degrees of paces and laugh at the wonder in our faces.
I saw a child born into strife, take up and hold the reins of life.
And that same child was heard to say,
Thank you God for showing me the way...*



Saying Goodbye to Roberta Brownlee

Roberta Brownlee, Free Rein Center's office manager for the last 3 years, gave up her "saddle" to travel and play more pickleball. She came to Free Rein from Indiana; her background in banking, inventory accounting and control, budgeting and management was a wonderful addition to the Free Rein team. Roberta helped us organize and rearrange our financial holdings leaving the Free Rein Center in positive shape. She came to Free Rein Center knowing very little about horses and ended up volunteering in the barn and in lessons when needed. Free Rein Center thanks her for her help in making the Free Rein Center more organized and continuing to be financially sound.

Welcome to Kara McCarson, Program Administrator/Volunteer Coordinator/ PATH Certified Riding Instructor

Kara McCarson is a familiar face around the Free Rein Center campus. She has been with Free Rein in a part-time capacity since 2011 serving first as barn staff and then in 2014 became certified by PATH as a Riding Instructor.

Now, in 2025, Kara continues as a Riding Instructor but has also taken on the responsibilities of Program Administrator and Volunteer Coordinator for the Free Rein Center. Kara began riding at age 10 when attending Keystone Camp. She is experienced with riding English style specifically hunter/jumper classifications but has also vaulted. She has been involved while in high school and college in showing horses. She received her first horse when age 16. If you have not met her through Free Rein, you might have met her at Brevard Animal Hospital where she worked from 2015 until August 2024.

Her current duties include still teaching lessons with our clients at Free Rein and now, as Program Administrator/Volunteer Coordinator, Kara will be scheduling student pre-session planning, creating plans for volunteer recruitment, training volunteers and scheduling volunteers. She will be the liaison between volunteers, staff, students, and the student's family. She will also assist Brittany McCathern, Program Director, with ongoing duties. Kara indicates one of her goals is "to keep the volunteers as happy as I can...I will do the best to make that happen where I can."

**Lessons Begin in September
Volunteer Today!
You will be glad you did!
www.freereincenter.org**

Program Update

The 2025 Spring session, along with 4 PATH instructors, 12 equine instructors and 80 volunteers, was a success. Despite a one-week cancellation due to wildfires, we served a total of 142 participants. The initial six-week spring session had an attendance of 80 participants, and the following four-week session had 62 participants. Participants included school groups, Transylvania Vocational Services, and individuals. One school group that normally participates was unable to do so due to transportation issues.



A large group from Big Brothers/Big Sisters enjoyed a 2-hour horse interaction event. Along with the help of volunteers and our three little equines, individuals had the opportunity to participate in stations that focused on learning horse anatomy, grooming, weighing and measuring and proper horse leading techniques. The event ended with a walk through the barn with carrots and apple treats for all our equine friends.

Little Hooves Touching Hearts, our miniature horse community outreach initiative, has made 6 visits to care centers in Transylvania, Henderson, and Buncombe counties, as well as to Transylvania Regional Hospital. This program continues to expand, with several facilities requesting repeat visits.



This program brings smiles and joy to so many. Ladybug, also known as Dolly, and Jolene are always a hit with residents, patients and staff as they continue training to obtain their therapy horse certification. Porsha Smith, a board member and program chair, has successfully completed her training and is now a certified Miniature Therapy Horse Handler.



Plans are in place for a new groundwork program. Our staff/instructor members, Brittany McCathern and Kara McCarton, along with program chair Porsha Smith, completed the Horse Powered Reading® Facilitators Training Course.

This research-based program uses Equine Assisted Learning to enhance reading skills, including decoding, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. It also focuses on problem solving, team building, and school success. Horses serve as reading partners, creating opportunities for immediate feedback and experiential learning while helping to build connections, motivation, confidence to assist in overcoming reading challenges.

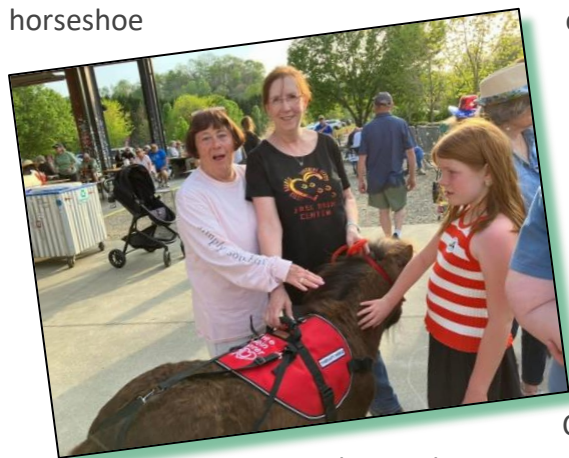


“Makin’ a Difference Monday”

This fundraiser at Oskar Blues on April 21 helped support the Free Rein Center for Therapeutic Riding and Education.

At the event music was provided by Josh and Mallory Carter from Pretty Little Goat along with a cornhole competition and a horse trivia game. Free Rein board members and volunteers were on hand to explain Free Rein’s mission of serving the community by strengthening the spirits, minds and bodies of children and adults through interaction with horses.

Prizes were handed out to the children who were judged to have drawn the best horse pictures; to those who mastered the horseshoe



cornhole game and to the winner of the horse trivia contest. Oskar Blues staff indicated it was a bigger turnout than usual for Mondays.

Free Rein

Center’s mini horses

also made an appearance. They included

Zoey, a Welsh pony, and Jolene and Dolly, both mini-horses.

The certified therapy horses are used for Free Rein Center’s outreach program, Little Hooves Touching Hearts, and are taken into adult facilities, hospitals and group homes.

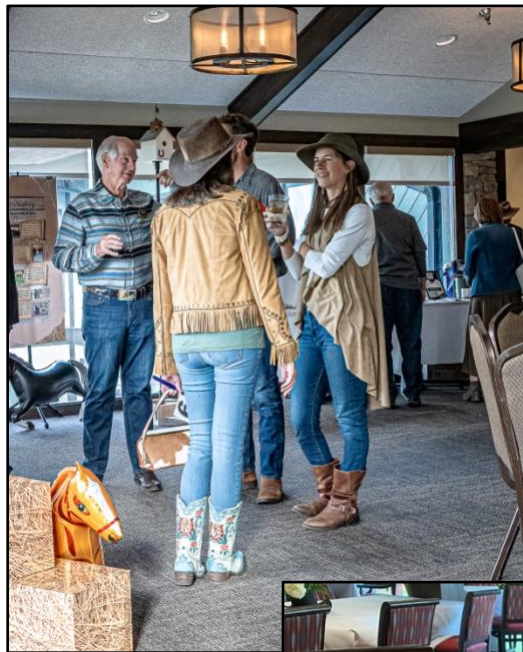
The Free Rein Center was grateful to Oskar Blues to help it finish up its spring session.

Free Rein Center closes in mid-May and will start the fall sessions in late August/early September. The sessions are filling up quickly for the fall and it is recommended that students be signed up for classes as soon as possible.



Gala Sets Fundraising Record for Free Rein

More than 200 supporters crowded into the Connestee Falls clubhouse for a Western-themed gala, named the Mane Event, to help Free Rein Center for Therapeutic Riding and Education raise more than double the funds from prior events. All proceeds will go to keeping the herd of 14 horses healthy and productive in the coming year.



It was also a chance to celebrate the staff and volunteers. Each give their time to Free Rein Center. The Mane Event gives all a chance to get together and include others who may or may not know the program. Susan Kish, Chair of the Board of Directors said more than 40 sponsors stepped up with silent and live auction items. "I was particularly pleased that there were folks who had never come to the gala before and I had people tell me afterward: 'We'll be here every year and we'll bring our friends.' You cannot ask for a better outcome than that."



Free Rein Staff

Brittany McCathern,
Program Director

Claire Ziffer, Office Manager

Kara Franks, Instructor/
Volunteer Coordinator/
Program Administrator

Toni Garrett, Instructor

Mary Stoeher, Instructor

2025 Board of Directors

Susan Kish, Board Chair

John Colflesh, Vice Chair

Andy Bullwinkel

Ann Farash

Danielle Goulet

Tamika Hunter

Porsha Smith

Caroline Wheeler

Carter Heyward,
Director Emeritus

Do you believe in Free Rein's Mission and want to help further?

Consider Planned Giving

Donate through an IRA

If you are age 72 or older (70 if you reached 70 before January 1, 2020) you may be interested in lowering your IRA withdrawal's income and taxes. Through an IRA Charitable Rollover, you can transfer up to \$100,000 a year directly from an IRA to a qualified 501(c)(3) nonprofit such as Free Rein. The transfer amount will not be included in your taxable income, and the transferred amount can count toward the required minimum distribution (RMD).

Bequests

These make up most planned gifts. Anyone can make a bequest to a nonprofit through their will or estate plan. You can allocate a specific amount of money to give after you pass, such as a lump sum or a percentage of your total wealth, or you can choose to give the remainder of your estate to a nonprofit after all the other bequests are paid. Because your gift does not go to the organization until after your lifetime, you can change your mind at any time, thus providing maximum flexibility.

Charitable Gift Annuities

This is an agreement in which the donor gives a significant gift to a nonprofit, receives a tax deduction at the time of the gift, and then receives payments from the nonprofit during their lifetime. The nonprofit may invest the money and after the donor's death, the nonprofit can use the remaining funds.

Donation of Stocks of Appreciated Assets

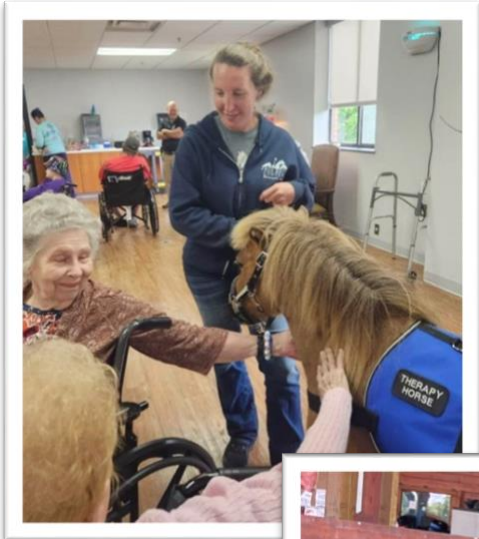
This is one of the most beneficial ways for giving, allowing you to receive favorable tax treatment. A donor who gives us a gift of common stock held longer than one year avoids capital gains taxation on the transfer, so the full value of the contribution goes to Free Rein.

Outright Gift of Cash or Check

A cash gift by check is one of the most common and easiest methods for making an outright charitable contribution. Besides a possible deduction on your tax return, a major benefit is seeing the immediate results of your generosity. When you make a cash gift, you are demonstrating a strong commitment to help support Free Rein's mission and vision and are contributing to its success. (Checks payable to Free Rein, Inc. may be mailed to P.O. Box 1325, Brevard, NC 28712)



Photo Gallery



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.

Platinum Level



Gold Level



Silver Level



Copper Level

