

Horse and Buddy, therapy for us both.

When my daughter Hana was born it was the happiest day of my life. When I was told she had developmental delays and two genetic disorders, I cried. After I recovered, I began doing research into her challenges and among the options was occupational therapy. At this time, I did not know about Horse and Buddy, but our OT did Hippotherapy there. She thought that this would be great help for Hana. So we went and tried it out and from that moment on we were both hooked.

I grew up in Miami, Florida and I rode some as a child, but always loved the feeling of being around horses. There is something magical to be around these wonderful animals. And to see my daughter finding pleasure in her OT lessons and actually listening to the Occupational Therapist was great. While she was riding she would always look at me and I felt I was distracting her so I would disappear into the barn and do chores. I would sweep the barn, fill up the water and work on other worker bee needs.

I decided I wanted to do more than just clean up while my daughter rode, so I became a volunteer. I began as a volunteer over 3 years ago and I have loved every minute of it. You see, volunteering did not just help the children, young people and adults who rode, but it also helped me. It is so encouraging to see how the interaction between the rider and the horses transform them both. During their time on the horses, the riders enjoy the feeling of the horse moving freely below them. For some of the riders this is as close to walking as they may ever get. To see the joy of the faces of the riders is something I never get enough of.

One of my favorite times is during the horse show. I have been at all three since I started volunteering, and this is one of the most fun times there. The riders get to ride in front of the crowds, some of them get to ride unaccompanied and they all get a ribbon. The cheers of the crowds, and the smiles on the faces of these riders are priceless. This year there was one particular girl who rode Grace, one of the larger horses at the barn. Natalie is 5 years old and about 3 feet tall and when she climbed up on that horse she was in control and she was so proud of what she was able to do. I thought as she rode that this will be Hana one day, and I felt so honored to be there with her on this special day. She was so excited when she won her ribbon and the crowd cheered!

Volunteering at Horse and Buddy, and being able to see the strides my daughter has made, has put those sad days behind me. I am grateful to have found such a wonderful place and the only thing I regret is that I did not know about it 10 years ago. Thank you Horse and Buddy for helping my daughter Hana.....and me.

Please consider participating in Horse and Buddy's 8<sup>th</sup> annual Buddy Derby. Your contributions help children like Hana and Natalie, and all proceeds go to the facility and program. Thank you for your support.

Jeremy Dunne  
Parent and Volunteer

