

Help for Free Rein Farm from 100 Women Who Care

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BELLAIRE – They are entirely too cute to be taken seriously. Their purpose, however, is very serious and it changes lives.

The horses and donkeys and their feathered friends bring joy to children and youth who struggle to find it outside the barn and nature trails on the ten acres of Free Rein Farm in Bellaire, a therapeutic riding center. The grooming of trails and tails works to help the young clients replace negative thoughts and behaviors while building confidence and life skills. “In my own life I have experienced first hand the benefits of working with horses,” says Kristin Molby, who started Free Rein on its current path four years ago and has developed programs specific to the needs of each client. “Sometimes it takes horse, or a donkey, to make a connection and build confidence.”

The hilltop farm is a place where the animals, all there because of their quiet and very friendly dispositions, help Molby guide each session. Because making choices is an important life skill, each session begins with thinking about what body or mind may need and making a choice. How about being the “leader of the herd” today? Or painting with and on the horses? Or grooming a mini-donkey? Or taking a nature hike? Or adjusting a Feelings Chart to what you are feeling? Or just breathing? Today, more than 40 individuals come to the farm for regular sessions. Referred by area counselors or just friends who spread the word.

After the sudden death of their first, and at the time, only, therapy horse, Boon, Molby and her husband Troy were left with the decision to go back to their previous professions or invest in what they saw as their calling. “My husband and I decided to pursue life and not money,” Molby remembers. “Our 401K built the barn. We felt a real calling to do something good in the world.”

Such good work in a relatively small place in the world received a big boost when Free Rein was selected by 100 Women Who Care-Elk Rapids Area, at its December meeting and will receive \$24,000 to purchase a trailer large enough to transport a team of therapy animals. “Free Rein Farm was a great fit for us,” said Peg Asmus co-founder of 100 Women Who Care—Elk Rapids Area. “They had a clear need - the horse trailer - that would allow them to expand their reach here in Antrim Coun-



From left, Laura Wilcox, with 'Indy', Free Rein Board member, Troy Molby, with 'Cowboy', Kristin Molby, with 'Crackle', and Deb Broderick, 100 Women who Care Treasurer.



Kristin with her team of seriously cute miniature donkeys.

ty. It's through collective donations for projects like this that we're able to support local organizations doing important work.”

The work includes participating in suicide prevention yellow ribbon events, mental health month in May, and whenever emotional regulation and positive mental health is needed most. In the past Molby rented a trailer and made multiple trips to a site to get all hooves in the same place.

A recent visit to Alba saw all the students come out and 'breathe with' and enjoy the healing effects of the donkeys. “Someone with ADD can come in and just stand for a few minutes and breathe.

Horses adjust to human emotion and can mirror feelings,” Kristin says. “They are always truthful and can match your heart rate from four feet away.” “There is often a powerful connection with one specific animal,” Troy recalls. “Communication came easier for one client who could not talk with Kristin, but conveyed feelings and needs through a donkey. We all need to feel love, and that is what our animals share. Sometimes it just takes a donkey.”

For more information about Free Rein Farm, visit www.FreeReinFarm.org For more information about 100 Women Who Care—Elk Rapids Area, visit 100womenselkrapids.org.