



*One of the HOOF campers gets up close and personal with an Louisville Equestrian Center lesson horse.*

*By Deveau Zubrod Kreitzer*

# HORSES OFFERING OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE FUTURE

**T**here's something about the outside of a horse that's good for the inside of a man.'  
-Winston Churchill

We've all heard this saying before, and any horse person would unfalteringly agree that no truer words were ever spoken. It was with these words that the vision of the HOOF KY program first came to light.

Horses Offering Opportunities for the Future is a program that was designed to allow inner-city and at-risk youth to connect to horses and let horses work their magic. Diane Fredricks, a lifelong horse person first had the idea to give the opportunity to let the horses work their magic in the lives of those that may not otherwise have the opportunity.

"She, along with her daughters, rode; and it provided a type

of therapy that no one else could give her," explained Anna Simpson, who serves as a riding instructor at the Louisville Equestrian Center; where the academies take place, as well as a member of the Board of Directors for HOOF KY. The program first was developed in 2010.

"Since 2010 we have partnered with The Louisville Equestrian Center and have hosted 18 academies over the past nine years with a total of 30 kids at each academy.. for a total of over 540 kids whose lives we have impacted," exclaimed Simpson. They are currently hosting two programs each summer, and they hope to expand to three this upcoming season, so they can continue to expose as many kids as possible to the healing nature of the horse. The academies run much like a summer camp, where the youth spend the day at the barn, rotating through stations where they learn riding, equine education, and barn management skills, along with games, crafts and more.



*These camper's lives were changed because of the HOOF camp.*

HOOF KY works with local Louisville, Kentucky-area foster kids and trauma-stricken youth to allow them to connect to horses in a way they've never had the opportunity. "Horses have the ability to touch the human spirit in ways not found in other relationships. They can break down emotional walls and barriers of distrust, isolation, and manipulation as the young participants interact with and take stewardship of the horses," said Simpson. "It is our hope that with the HOOF KY participants, the program will lead to positive life choices and a productive life style."

They have partnered with The Cabbage Patch settlement House, which is an inner-city program in Louisville that has the same mission as HOOF KY, and they have also had foster children from Uspiritus and Sunrise Children's Services that attend each year. The attendees range from 9-18 years of age, and both boys and girls can attend.

Over the years, Simpson has seen kids that have gone through the program return as graduates, and some are now counselors themselves with Cabbage Patch. Watching them come full circle has been rewarding for Simpson, who has been involved with the program since its inception.

"We had a young boy attend last year from the foster system, these kids sometimes get to have weekend passes to go home for good behavior; they get checked out on Fridays and return

on Sundays," recalled Simpson. "The staff from his facility said that this kid was hard to get along with, had behavioral issues and a terrible attitude most time, and that he rarely got to go home on the weekends. The entire week of HOOF KY camp he was agreeable, participated and answered questions, was eager to ride each day, and on top of that; the staff could see a change in his behavior from day one! They couldn't get over how it was affecting his life so quickly! Thursday evening came and he had earned himself a pass to go home for the weekend due to his good behavior; but you know what, he turned it down, he didn't want to miss the last day of riding and being with the horses. An opportunity he said he may never have again. This young man had a chance to get out of 'lockdown' to see his family and he chose the horses! This is what type of impact we are hoping to have on more and more of our local youth!"

The impact that the HOOF KY program is making on the lives of youth throughout Louisville is leaving a lasting impact, and it's something that Simpson has said has changed her life forever: "I love what I do as a riding instructor; but this program puts an entirely different meaning to my job. To see how these young people connect and relate to the horses is one of the most rewarding things I have ever done. Of course, we all want to train a horse or rider to a world title, but providing this opportunity to these kids makes everything I do complete, and I really feel as though I am helping to make a difference in these kids' lives!"

*Two of the riders at one of the 2016 Summer Camps learn to ride independently.*



*Two campers at one of the 2018 camps watch and await their turn.*

Simpson and the others involved with the program are looking to not only enrich the lives of their campers, but they hope to give them opportunities in the horse industry in the future as well.

"Bud Willimon comes every year during the academies and talks with the boys about jobs in the shoeing business. He tells them if they ever need a job to come see him, and he offers to help teach these young men a trait to provide for themselves when they get older! It's small things like this we are hoping to help guide our local youth into impacting positive perspectives and life choices."

While not every youth that comes through the program will develop a lifelong love for the horse, it's clear that an overwhelming percentage of them gain so many positive life lessons from the program. They are learning responsibility, self-confidence, restraint, respect, kindness, and so much more. These attributes are also preparing the participants to make positive choices in their everyday lives.

"Many of the attendees experience low self-image and a declining sense of personal empowerment, hiding behind the defenses of negative behaviors, manipulation, and isolation. HOOF KY understands that you can't fool a horse; consequently, our participants quickly learn that they must EARN the companionship of a horse which can positively impact their perspective and their life choices."

The HOOF KY Board of Directors continue to work hard to raise money to help send Kentucky youth to these

programs, and in the long-term they hope to have summer-long programs and then have yearly scholarships to offer to the outstanding participants to ride year-round and then to eventually help with vocational and job placement in the horse business.

While they have big dreams and goals for the program for the future, it's no surprise that it's quite costly to run the program. They raise approximately \$28,000 each year, and each camp's expenses runs right at \$11,550 a week. In order to raise money for the program, they conduct several major fundraisers throughout the year. They run a large silent auction in conjunction with the KASPHA State Championship Horse Show in September; and their most successful endeavor has been the HOOF KY Horse Show at the Kentucky State Fairgrounds. Last year was the first year the show was held there, and it was a rousing success. They sold 130 stalls, with a huge academy session, and a full line up of 28 performances classes. They were able to raise \$10,000 from the show.

They will be hosting the show again this summer on Saturday July 20th at the Kentucky State Fairgrounds in the covered outdoor arena. They continue to expand their goals for the future, and while they hope to continue offering additional academies, so they can expose even more youth to the amazing equines, they don't want to limit the program to just their area either: "I believe other barns in other cities could easily get a program such as ours going," said Simpson.

**For more information about HOOF KY and to support the program visit their website [www.hoofky.org](http://www.hoofky.org).**