

NONPROFIT PROFILE



Prairie Parnell, Therapeutic Instructor, Courtney Willis, Asst. Director, Courtney Ortiz, Rider, Lisa Paynor, Volunteer, Michelle Mora, Rider, Nicole Mattingling, Volunteer, Brooke Bettinger, Volunteer, Celena Salinas, Program Director, Jonathan Martin, Rider, Melanie Nevins, Volunteer.

HAVEN'S HORSES

Ministry through horsemanship

For seven years and counting, Haven's Horses has given children, both able-bodied and disabled, the ability to carry themselves with confidence. Through therapeutic riding and various horsemanship classes, the Keller-based ministry — a division of the residential foster home called Christ's Haven for Children — teaches kids life skills through connecting with one of the world's most magnificent creatures. Haven's Horses is constantly accepting new riders for physical therapy on horseback and therapeutic riding. At Haven's Horses, "We believe everyone can ride."

Celena Salinas, program director for Haven's Horses, has been involved with the organization since its inception in 2008. Her daughter, now 12, used to struggle with dyslexia. "I saw what the horsemanship classes did for her, boosting her confidence," she says. "I fell in love with the program, so I started volunteering." Haven's Horses is especially beneficial for children who have disabilities like autism, Down syndrome, cerebral palsy or even brain injuries because they are able to improve their cognitive processing, balance coordination and communication skills. According to Salinas, horses work particularly well with children who have Asperger syndrome or seizure disorders because the animals can sense the moments before a child experiences a seizure episode. Additionally, a horse's gait is similar to the way people walk, so riders are using muscles they might not use on a regular basis and are therefore gaining valuable physical exercise.

"We have one rider who is severely disabled," Salinas says. "It was a tremendous struggle to hold her and have her on the horse because she doesn't have the core to sit up. Recently, I was at the stables watching her lesson. It was a complete 180 from when I first saw her to seeing her then. She was actually sitting up instead of hunched over. It was a speechless thing to witness. To know that's what I'm a part of makes it so rewarding."

Haven's Horses keeps 14 horses, each of which is accustomed to spending time with young children and has a special personality that is patient and gentle. The program is unique in that it takes a clinical method like therapy and brings it into a non-clinical environment: the outdoors, where children can feel more comfortable as they bond with the animals. Haven's Horses also promotes the mission that Christ's Haven for Children advocates: fostering a relationship with Jesus Christ. The entire staff of volunteers is dedicated to improving all children's lives through horsemanship and doing so in a safe and loving environment. Haven's Horses is always accepting donations and sponsorships that help the program not only provide items like riding helmets, western tack and barn supplies but also invite corporations to embrace the opportunity to get involved with the program. Several wish list items include an English therapeutic riding saddle (\$1,500), Comfort treeless saddle (\$600) and an electric chair lift (\$10,000).

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