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PALS celebrating 10 years of service

By PALS
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People & Animal Learning Service kicked off its year-long celebration marking 10 years of service to the Bloomington area April 11 with a birthday party.

The party, sponsored and coordinated by the Indiana University Student Foundation, was attended by more than 75 riders, parents, volunteers and donors who participated in many games including a pinata, face painting and pin the tail on the horse.

PALS is an equine-assisted program providing therapeutic riding for people with disabilities and at-risk youth in the Bloomington area. It has provided more than 12,100 lessons since 2000 and serves youth and adult riders from Monroe and the eight surrounding counties. PALS' services provide therapeutic benefits to riders by helping improve their physical and mental health. Riders report having improved joint mobility, balance and coordination; increased muscle power and self-confidence through improved self-image as part of the benefits of their therapeutic riding. Kathy Morrison, a parent of a PALS rider, attended the event. She says, "Our daughter, Erin, is 11 years old and has cerebral palsy. She normally gets around in her wheelchair, but riding the horse gives her body an opportunity to move in many different ways. Monroe County is very fortunate to have PALS and the way in which they enrich the lives of people with disabilities in our community."

The demand for PALS services has steadily increased since its inception. Currently, they have a wait list of riders interested in PALS services. Fern Bonchek, executive director of PALS, says, "We've been so fortunate to have tremendous support from the community throughout the past 10 years. It is fun to reflect on how far we've come. We are looking forward to expanding our programs and services in the very near future to continue to meet the needs in our community. Our goal is to provide a wider variety of equine-assisted programs to more individuals with disabilities and youth. We will be making an exciting announcement soon about our future plans."

As a nonprofit organization, PALS funding is derived almost exclusively from donations, grants and special events. The organization charges a nominal fee for lessons and provides scholarships for those who cannot afford these costs. PALS is the only NARHA Premier Accredited program in all of the nine counties it serves and a United Way of Monroe County Certified Member Agency. For more information about PALS, see www.palstherapy.org, e-mail pals@indiana.edu or call 336-2798.



Courtesy photo PALS rider Erin Morrison gets ready to strike the pinata at the PALS 10-year birthday party.

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