

PALS: Equine therapy improves quality of living

By Fern Bonchek, Executive Director

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People & Animal Learning Services, Inc. (PALS) is a nonprofit 501(c) (3) organization in Bloomington, Indiana, that offers Equine Assisted Activities (EAA) such as therapeutic riding and hippotherapy to children and adults with disabilities and to at-risk youth. Since the 1950s, EAA have been identified as beneficial forms of exercise and recreation for people with a wide range of disabilities. EAA combine goals in sports, recreation, therapy, and education.

In 2007, PALS will provide over 1,700 therapeutic riding lessons and hippotherapy sessions to children and adults with disabilities and to at-risk youth.

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Quotes from PALS riders

"I think anyone with any kind of disability should join PALS, because you can do things you never dreamed you would be able to do."

- Sierra L., 16, three-year PALS rider

"They structure the lesson to the person. I mean, if you're having trouble with math, they'll incorporate that into the lesson to show that it's not just in school and not just some torture device. . . . Now, I hope they'll never put algebra in there!"

- Emma R., 15, two-year PALS rider

"PALS is fun. You can ride horses there. You should get there early so you can play with the kitties and look at the horsies. They are good horsies. [My horse] Cody is the most difficult one, and I do it."

- Vincent B., 9, five-month PALS rider

".. Vincent loves PALS. It is something he feels successful with, never a question. There is a huge smile on his face most of the time he is there and especially when he is riding. There is nothing happier for a mother than to see her small child beam with joy, after the challenges that the rest of the day and the world might bring."

- Diane, Vincent's Mom



Photo submitted
PALS client Emma rides Macho, one of the agency's horses.

PALS

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In 2007, PALS will provide over 1,700 therapeutic riding lessons and hippotherapy sessions to children and adults with disabilities and to at-risk youth. PALS

has a strong and successful history. Since 2000, PALS has provided 6,800 high-quality equine assisted lessons, improving the lives of hundreds of children, youth, and seniors in our community. Riding a horse at PALS is the highlight of the week for over 150 persons with disabilities and at-risk youth. PALS is the only NARHA Premier Accredited Center (see www.narha.org) in the area, and we are actively involved with the Indiana Horse Council. In addition, PALS is a United Way of

Monroe County Member Agency. It is our desire to provide services to all who apply regardless of financial status; therefore, scholarships are offered to our riders as needed. PALS serves riders from Monroe, Bartholomew, Brown, Greene, Jackson, Johnson, Lawrence, Marion, Morgan, Owen, and Putnam counties.

PALS has over 65 weekly riders (150 riders per year) and over 150 weekly volunteers. Volunteers assist in lessons as leaders or sidewalkers or help with barn

chores. For more information about riding or volunteering at PALS, for general information, or to set up a barn tour, please contact Fern Bonchek at pals@indiana.edu, 812-336-2798, or www.palstherapy.org.

You can learn more about PALS and Equine Assisted Activities by attending the 7th Annual PALS Fun Show on Saturday October 27th from 10:30am – 5:30 pm at Ellington Stables – 680 West That Rd, Bloomington, IN.