



*Friends For Tomorrow, Inc.*



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We usually see John entering the barn aisle long before his mother. In his excitement to prepare for his weekly ride, he runs ahead, eager to begin grooming "his horse," Dayton.

John didn't start out being so eager to engage with horses. Three years ago, when he first visited Friends For Tomorrow, he wouldn't touch or make eye contact with any of the horses. He visited twice, working each time to get more comfortable with the barn environment: the sights, the sounds, and the scents.

Children we work with often have many challenges: physical, behavioral, sensory. Some have trouble following routines, recognizing social cues and emotional gestures.



Dirty hands and other tactile sensations were a challenge for John in the beginning. The tackiness of reins, the quilted plushness of the saddle pad, and the gritty texture of the arena footing were all off-putting to him. Head Instructor Lucy used John's own obstacles to develop his horse care and riding skills. Disliking dirty hands and feet himself, Lucy knew that John would not want that for Dayton, so picking his hooves became an empowering and behavior changing part of the lesson. Brushing became more welcoming with the thought of making him feel better, "Grooming gets Dayton's itches out," John said. He continued to challenge himself at each weekly lesson with encouragement from his instructor and achievements in the saddle through exercises, skill challenges, and games. This new found confidence pushed John outside of his comfort zone, allowing him to firmly grasp the reins to steer Dayton through the cones, and learn to post and trot as well as ride in the woods.

During dinosaur theme week, we watched as John let his imagination go and dug through the sand with his hands in search of "bones." For a child like John, these are all victories that translate to other situations and challenges which arise at other times in his week.

All students benefit from movement across time and space. Sitting still in a chair can be challenging for an active young boy like John. Riding a horse allows for the environment to move around him while he receives the gentle input from Dayton's walk, reducing any lingering feeling of restlessness. The rocking motion of the horse's stride and the warmth of the horse's body on a student's legs help soothe away anxiety.

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We witnessed an incredible milestone the day John brought his grandmother to the farm. He led her through the barn aisle telling her which door to enter, where to wait, and how to brush the horse. He was very excited to be the expert and introduce his grandmother to "his place" and with immense pride, showing her all his new found skills. His mother also reports that each week when they drive up to the barn, John will say, "Mom, do you know that's Sparky? That's Thor," and he continues to call out the name of the horses as they pass each one.

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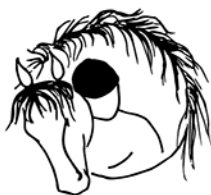
At Friends For Tomorrow, we embrace every students' challenges and design a custom riding curriculum for each. We are committed to working with each child to address their individual needs, finding ways to minimize the obstacles they face, to achieve their personal goals in a supportive and comforting environment. Your support will allow us to continue the work we are so passionate about - to nurture the children that come to the farm, helping them to build the foundation necessary to be successful in their lives.

*The Outside of a Horse is Good for the Inside of a Child.*

On behalf of our students and volunteers, and our staff,  
please accept my gracious and sincere appreciation for your  
generosity this year. Your gift brings these precious moments  
to life for all our families. Sending you all warmest wishes,



Diane B. Lesneski Auger, Founder



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