



Delray Beach woman's equine program helps local children in need.

By Darcy Clinton *Special Correspondent*

Name: Stacy Gormley, 25

Family: Parents Bob and Deb Gormley of Grand Rapids, Mich.

Birthplace: Charleston, W.Va.

Residence: Delray Beach

Career: Equine trainer and instructor and founder of the Fidelis Foundation

Cause: The Fidelis Foundation, a nonprofit organization using equine-assisted programs to provide a sanctuary for children in need. Volunteers teach basic to advanced riding skills, helping the children develop healthy relationships with adults and peers in the process.

Q. Describe your volunteer work.

A. I work with six other volunteer trainers offering weekly riding instruction to Broward and Palm Beach County children between the ages of 4 and 18. By pairing a volunteer who understands special-needs children with one who is a seasoned equestrian, children become more communicative, more affectionate, gain confidence and learn about responsibility and commitment as they learn to care for and ride our program horses.

Q. How did you decide to help foster children through equine-based programs?

A. I was a house parent for two different foster homes run by 4Kids of South Florida, a foster agency serving Broward County. I realized the children really wanted to feel the kind of love and support horses provide. They needed an environment where they could feel normal and secure again.

Q. How does learning to ride help the children in your program?

A. The barn and the horses provide an environment where the children can relax and release barriers preventing them from developing meaningful relationships. Our program gives them an outlet to forget about their troubles for a few hours each week and run, play and feel safe. The horses are able to dissolve their defense mechanisms and unlock their little hearts, helping them heal.

Q. What goals do you have for the foundation?

A. We recently opened our programs and events to children experiencing any emotional or life challenge — not just foster care children. We've also added the Rising Star program as a way to teach leadership and outreach to young riders showing exceptional riding talent and character.

Q. Aside from money, what does your organization need?

A. Office space and equipment and administrative volunteers in the Delray Beach or Boca Raton area are at the top of our list. We also need art supplies for a new art program we're developing, and packaged refreshments for our trainers and children. We're also grateful for any in-kind donation that helps us take care of the horses.

For information about the Fidelis Foundation, visit www.fidelisfoundation.com, e-mail: info@fidelisfoundation.com or call 561-860-4567.