

TEAM



Everybody needs a friend to depend on. Sometimes that friend is a horse!

SYDNEY SAWYER

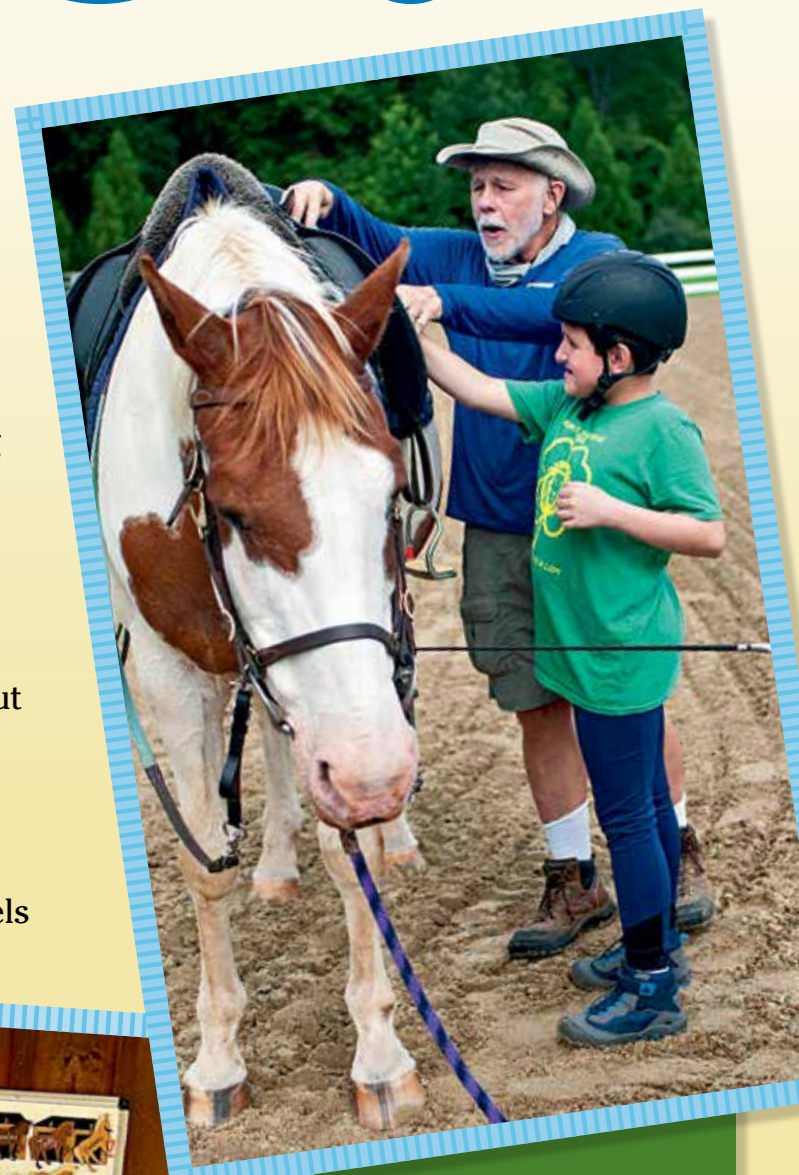
EFFORT

BY ELLEN LAMBETH; PHOTOS BY SUSAN MCELHINNEY

You can tell that Andy and Taffy are friends (see photo at **left**), as they stand calmly face to face—well, maybe nose to nose. They may be saying “hello” or just “thank you for being my friend.” Andy finds calming comfort by spending time with his big, flaming-red buddy. And you can see that he’s wearing a helmet and Taffy is wearing a bridle. That could mean that it’s time to mount up and work as a team to make some tracks in that sand!

Andy has been coming to this riding center in Virginia for years. It’s called the Cloverleaf Equine Center. Here, it’s all about helping kids—and others—who live with disabilities. And how can horses help with that? Think of the bond between a blind person and his or her seeing-eye dog. The dog follows its training, and the person feels confident and relaxed.

On the Cloverleaf barn wall at **right**, you can see their list of horses and where each one belongs when not being ridden. But right now, it’s time to saddle up!



Roger (in his blue volunteer shirt) helps Cisco adjust the stirrup before mounting Kota.



With volunteer Alejandra's coaching, Mousa finds a comfortable balance while Tex starts at a walk.



1

Practice Makes Perfect!

Mousa is one of several kids in today's lesson. Here in the ring, he works on the skills needed to feel comfortable atop his mount, named Tex. (How did the horse get his name? Check out the white marking on his belly in the photo **above right**. People thought it was shaped like the state of Texas.)

Follow the photos here from start to finish to see the skills Mousa is working on.



2

Mousa shows how to use reins for control. The green part shows where to hold on—not too loose, not too tight. Next, Mousa uses his balance and the left rein to "tell" Tex to turn left.

3



Time to speed things up! Volunteer Diala leads Tex into a trot as Mousa practices leaning into the faster pace—eyes forward, heels down.



4



5

"Thanks for today, Tex!" After dismounting, Mousa slides the saddle's stirrup up and out of the way.

Hooray for Helping Hooves!

Horses, of course, are the center of attention here at Cloverleaf. The kids in this story all made progress on their riding skills. But just getting the chance to be outside, being with other kids, interacting with awesome animals...all make each visit worthwhile. If weather is an issue, there's an indoor arena to ride in. (It's there in the background of the photo at **right**).

Cloverleaf has other goals, though. Horses have a way of working with kids with disabilities. A horse and its rider become like a single unit. They do that by "reading" each other's

movements and energy level. The more they work together that way, the more relaxed and confident they both feel. And that feeling can be quite healing!

The group riding lesson you see on these pages isn't the only activity that happens at Cloverleaf. There are also special programs that include crafts and games, shows and special events, physical and behavior therapy, and more. And it's not just for kids. There are also programs for teens and adults. It all boils down to this one idea: Need a boost? Hop on a horse! 🐾

Rangers: We thank the staff at Cloverleaf Equine Center for sharing this program with our readers. To learn more, visit cloverleafequinecenter.org. We also thank the participants for inviting us into their experiences. To find something similar near you, visit pathintl.org/find-a-program.

—R.R.



Score! Finn "hits the mark" as he tosses the ring on the pole while riding Cinder past it! Volunteer Kate cheers him on.



Lauren, the lesson instructor, adjusts the stirrup length on Kota's saddle. Cisco is excited to get going!



At the end of the day's lesson, Cisco says "thank you" to Tex with a smile and a treat.

Something has Domino's full attention. Maybe he's watching the kids leave after their lesson? See you next week!

