

EQUICENTER

HOLIDAY 2005

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EQUICENTER

"Be the change you wish to see in the world."

Caitlin on Hope.



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November 25, 2005

Dear Friends,

Gandhi has said, "Be the change you wish to see in the world." The therapeutic horseback riding program at the EquiCenter in Mendon has been just that change for us, enriching not only the life of our daughter who has special needs but also the lives of our family as a whole.

Our daughter, Cailin, was born with global developmental delays. She is nonverbal, has respiratory immune deficiencies and exhibits many characteristics similar to children with autism. Cailin uses sign language and a communication device to express her needs. She is six years old, and attends first grade. Daily we work on communication and life skills. There are times we worry about the future, but then we reflect on how beautiful life is and how simple it can be: Cailin is a beautiful treasure in our lives.

From our experiences with her, we knew it was important that we expose Cailin to programs that would help fulfill the simplest targets for her, that she have realistic and achievable goals, and that the programs were well-suited and safe. Cailin has always had an affinity for animals, and we thought she would benefit from an animal-assisted therapy program, but the few programs we found considered Cailin neither the right size or age to participate.

Then we discovered the EquiCenter and the remarkable programs it offers that extend well beyond the fences. We are grateful to Stacy and Jonathan Friedlander for starting this program, as they have a true passion and desire to help improve the lives of others. The EquiCenter involves many volunteers and long hours. When we watch Cailin ride each week, we observe the empowerment within the participants, the horses and the volunteers. Cailin knows the day of her lesson, and she signs and now *says* "horse" as we drive up to the barn! We have seen improvement in Cailin's communication skills since beginning riding lessons, and we hope her verbal skills will continue to develop. Cailin now uses two to three signs when expressing herself and she attempts to verbalize the horses' names. Her teachers have noted an improvement in attention and behavior, as well as an increase in imaginative play. There has also been improvement in Cailin's posture and balance.

Cailin has one older brother and two younger sisters, and the EquiCenter has received all of us with open arms. To see Cailin's siblings smiling and cheering her on, meeting other participants as well as volunteers, and interacting with the horses allows us, as a family, to share in a caring and diverse community. Best of all, the EquiCenter is Cailin's *island of competence* in what is often a confusing world. At the EquiCenter, Cailin is abled and confident.

The EquiCenter is not under the umbrella of a parent organization, and therefore must sustain itself financially. We think it is very important to share our story about this terrific place not only for Cailin's sake, but for all the current participants and all who will benefit from the programs in the future. We need to help the EquiCenter grow, flourish, and become a stable fixture in our community.

At this time of holiday gathering, we are so grateful for what we have as a family and for what the EquiCenter has brought into our lives. Please join us in supporting the EquiCenter for Cailin and the many individuals in this community like her. Your gift will truly make a difference in the lives of many, making the "ride" easier for all involved.

Gratefully yours,

Jean and Stuart MacKenzie

