

## Exceptional Equestrians Summary Report

### **Information about the Applicant**

Exceptional Equestrians serves people with special needs throughout Wisconsin. Exceptional Equestrians is the only provider of hippotherapy north of Milwaukee. Our client's range in age from two to adult with physical and cognitive disabilities such as cerebral palsy, spina bifida, down syndrome, brain injury, autism, sensory processing disorder and neuromuscular disorders. Our footprint for participants coming to our facility for services is growing and currently encompasses 13 WI counties. Currently we are serving over 500 youth a month. Here at Exceptional Equestrians, no youth is denied services no matter their ability to pay. We offer assistance to the youth and their families with reduced fees to help with the cost of mental health and hippotherapy treatment. Financial assistance is directly provided to those families in need by grants we receive.

Currently, we have a waiting list of over 90 youth with special needs. Funding would allow us to open more sessions, enabling us to help those who need our services. In addition, COVID-19 pandemic has doubled the number of mental health referrals coming to Exceptional Equestrians. Exceptional Equestrians requests funding to support the need in our community for mental health and hippotherapy programs for children with disabilities. Support from the Wispact Foundation would directly impact the families receiving programming here at Exceptional Equestrians. The Wispact Foundation and Exceptional Equestrians' mission align; "For more than 20 years, we have been committed to bettering the lives of people of all abilities through the healing power of horses." According to LIFE Study data Brown County has a significantly higher percentage of children with disabilities than the U.S. average - 7% vs 5% nationally. This proposal will result in children with mental health needs and physical/cognitive disabilities in Wisconsin having access to care that is otherwise unavailable. Hippotherapy is occupational therapy, physical therapy, or speech and language pathology with the patient riding a therapy horse. Each session involves a team that includes the therapist, patient, horse leader, and side walkers. Objectives would include: 1) provide access to mental health and hippotherapy services to children with disabilities in Wisconsin, 2) to provide year-round mental health and hippotherapy services to improve cognitive, physical, emotional, and social well-being, 3) to provide access to affordable equine therapies, including financial assistance for families in low-income households. If funding is approved, we would immediately be able to open more sessions, alleviate a large portion of the waiting list and increase the overall caseload of our therapists.

### **Statement of Need**

Exceptional Equestrians requests a grant in the amount of \$10,000. All programs at Exceptional Equestrians depend heavily on community support. Exceptional Equestrians is committed to ensuring that no one is denied the opportunity to experience the healing power of horses due to inability to pay. Over 80% of our participants are on the CITS waiver meaning they are coming from low-income families. The requested amount would directly be allocated to financial assistance for those families in need.

### **Project Goals and Expected Benefits**

**Adaptive riding**, is our program aimed at teaching beginning level horsemanship and riding skills to individuals with cognitive, motor and sensory impairments. Riders learn to groom, tack, and guide their horses' using reins. Many riders progress from the walk to the trot which requires additional balance, strength, and coordination. Perhaps the most profound impact of adaptive riding on individuals with disabilities is improvement in confidence and self-esteem.

Our riders are empowered when they discover a newfound ability to guide a 1200-pound horse through an obstacle course independently using reins. To participate in an activity where we can achieve and excel is an outcome, we all strive for. Exceptional Equestrians Adaptive riding program offers that opportunity.

**Equine-experiential therapy**, is an "off horse" program that uses guided interaction with horses to promote communication, team building, confidence and self-esteem. Participants complete activities that require cooperation and group effort. The human-horse bond has long been a source of emotional healing and well-being. Our Taking the Lead program works with young adolescents giving them the coping skills and strategies to develop more effective relationships with family and friends. Taking the Lead also addresses the mental health and social well-being of our youth by offering services to trauma victims, offering a safe place to explore issues and begin healing.

### **Project Implementation Plan**

This is an ongoing program that is already implemented to provide horseback riding as a form of therapy.

### **Evaluation Plan**

Exceptional Equestrians evaluation plan is monthly as many of our referrals are from physicians, case managers, or social workers. Exceptional Equestrians therapists are required to evaluate progress after each session with our participants and report back to the referring agency. Often the referring agency will survey the family after their programming is complete, and we monitor the responses we receive from the families. In addition, we will measure the number of sessions YOY and the number of financial assistances given out to families in need YOY.

### **Budget**

#### **2022 Exceptional Equestrians Budget**

- **Revenue**
  - o Program Revenue \$196,438
  - o Development & Fundraising Revenue \$370,000
  - o Total Revenue \$566,438
- **Expenses**
  - o Salaries \$373,232
  - o Horse Care \$39,288
  - o Administration & General \$34,500
  - o Maintenance & Utilities \$29,466
  - o Insurance \$25,000
  - o Financial Assistance \$59,150
  - o Total Expenses \$560,636

### **Staff Recommendation**

The grant application cannot be recommended for approval. While the services do benefit individuals with disabilities the grant would appear to be applied toward operational expenses which we cannot support.