

SPIRIT Open Equestrian Awarded A \$1,863 CHAA Legacy Gift Fund Pay-it-Forward Grant for Its Equine- Assisted Therapy Programs

SPIRIT, Herndon, VA, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit with 18 years of experience, is a dedicated equine-assisted services organization offering recreational and therapeutic programs for children and adults of all abilities. Our diverse range of programs includes Therapeutic Riding and Horsemanship, Equine-Assisted Psychotherapy, Occupational Therapy incorporating Hippotherapy, Equine-Assisted Learning, a specialized Veterans program, and customized workshops designed to meet the unique needs of each group. Through these initiatives, we strive to create inclusive and transformative experiences that foster growth, healing, and connection.

The organization's team includes certified therapeutic riding instructors, licensed mental health professionals, and skilled equine specialists, all committed to providing transformative experiences. SPIRIT operates in accordance with PATH Intl. (Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International) standards, ensuring the highest levels of safety, professionalism, and program effectiveness.

Doug Gaibler, Board Member of Spirit Open Equestrian, brought this opportunity to LGF to support the program and its riders. Doug's history with Spirit is long and personal.

"My daughter Alison, now 50, has participated at SPIRIT for over ten years, which first drew me into this remarkable program. Alongside the joy and therapeutic value it brings her, I quickly saw its broader impact on her peers in the special needs community.

SPIRIT enriches participants' lives while also sustaining a dedicated network of more than 100 volunteers. What moves me most is the genuine understanding and relationships that form between riders and volunteers—connections that deepen awareness, inclusion, and empathy far beyond the arena."

The LGF Grant of \$1,863 has enhanced Spirit's Therapeutic Riding programs by purchasing specialty adaptive equipment to facilitate therapeutic program activities. Read on for more details about the equipment our grant provided to Spirit.

<https://spiritequestrian.org>

SMALL TOOLS, BIG BREAKTHROUGHS

Because of your generosity, our therapeutic riders are better able to develop independence, confidence, and connection.

Adaptive riding often begins with one fundamental goal: creating safe, clear communication between rider and horse while supporting each participant's unique physical needs. The adaptive and program equipment purchased through the CH2M Hill Legacy Fund – Pay it Forward Grant allows SPIRIT to provide more accessible, supportive, and effective equine-assisted experiences for riders of all abilities.

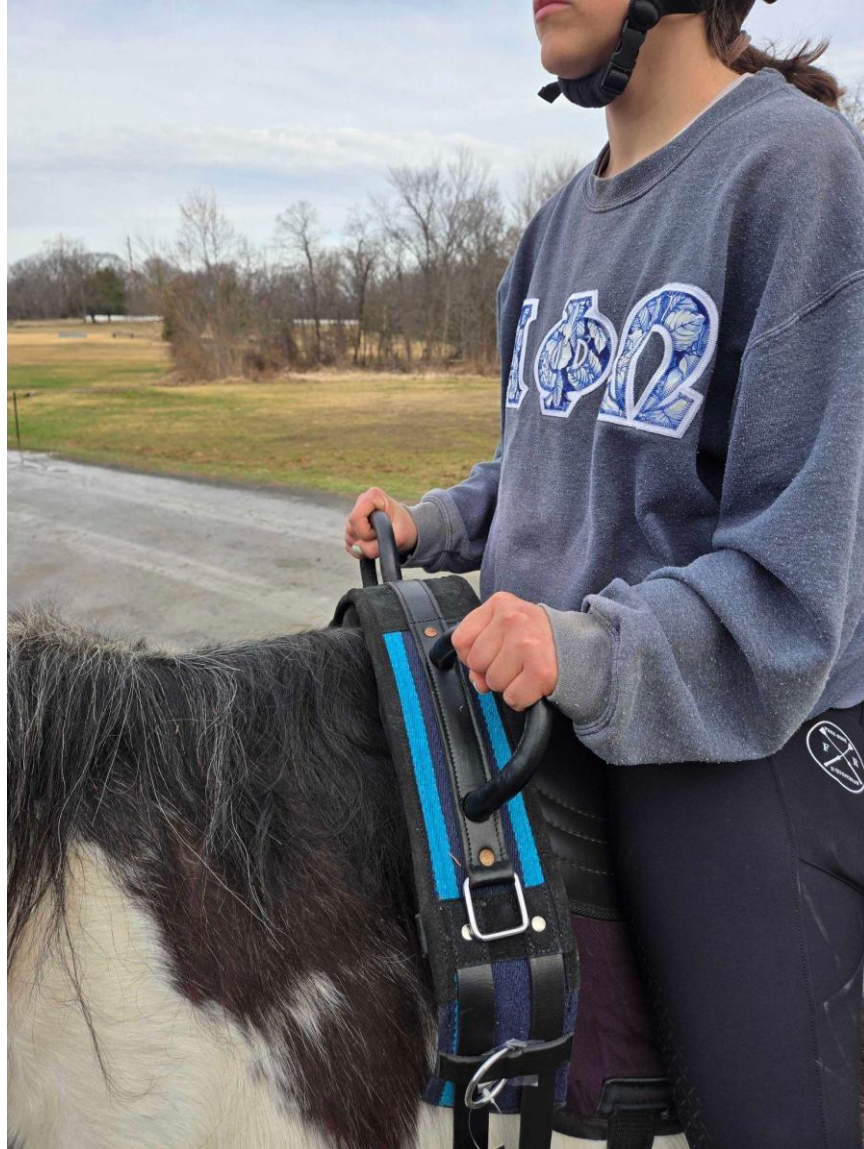


Each piece of adaptive equipment is carefully fitted to support the individual needs of every rider—setting them up for success.

Surcingle with handles

Balance and core stability are foundational to riding—but for many therapeutic students, these skills are still developing.

The **Surcingle with handles** provides a stable and secure interface between rider and horse, particularly for participants riding without a traditional saddle to increase sensory and motor input. The integrated handles give riders a safe place to stabilize themselves while developing strength and postural control.



Using a surcingle with handles, Emily can focus on balance and posture while feeling secure—building strength with every step.

Impact in practice:

Emily is working on trunk control and balance development. Using the handles, she can stabilize herself during transitions and directional changes, allowing her to actively engage her core muscles rather than relying entirely on instructor support. Each lesson builds strength while maintaining safety and confidence.

Bareback pad

The **Bareback pad** supports rider comfort while encouraging engagement of key muscle groups. Riding without a structured saddle allows participants to feel the horse's movement more directly, promoting balance, coordination, and body awareness.

Its non-slip design increases stability for both horse and rider while also protecting the horse's back through shock absorption.

Impact in practice:

Spirit's OT/PT therapist uses the bareback pad for her Hippotherapy clients - where OT/PT skills are supported by riding. The Hippotherapy clients using the bareback pad experience increased body awareness and improved alignment, helping translate riding skills into improved balance and functional movement off the horse.

Double neck strap

The **Double neck strap** provides riders with an additional point of stability while learning correct hand and body position. This Correct Connect–based support allows riders to steady themselves without pulling on the horse's mouth, encouraging softer and clearer communication.



With the support of Correct Connect, Saira is able to maintain steady contact and actively guide her horse—turning effort into independence.



Adaptive connections like Correct Connect help keep reins evenly positioned, giving riders clearer communication and greater success.

Impact in practice:

Saira previously required continuous instructor intervention to maintain rein position and balance. With the added stability of the double neck strap, she is now able to maintain steadier hands while actively guiding her horse—shifting from passive participation toward independent control.

The 3-in-1 training breastplate

The **3-in-1 training breastplate** helps riders develop correct position and rein use by limiting excessive pulling and encouraging proper alignment of arms and hands.

This tool supports both new riders learning foundational skills and advancing riders refining coordination and feel.

Impact in practice:

Riders gain clearer feedback about how their body position affects the horse, allowing instructors to teach correct mechanics while reducing frustration for both horse and participant.

The Heather Comfort Connect Rein

The **Heather Comfort Connect Rein** provides supportive padded reins designed for riders with weak grip strength, sore hands, arthritis, or sensory sensitivities. The padded rein surface improves comfort and makes consistent rein contact easier to maintain.



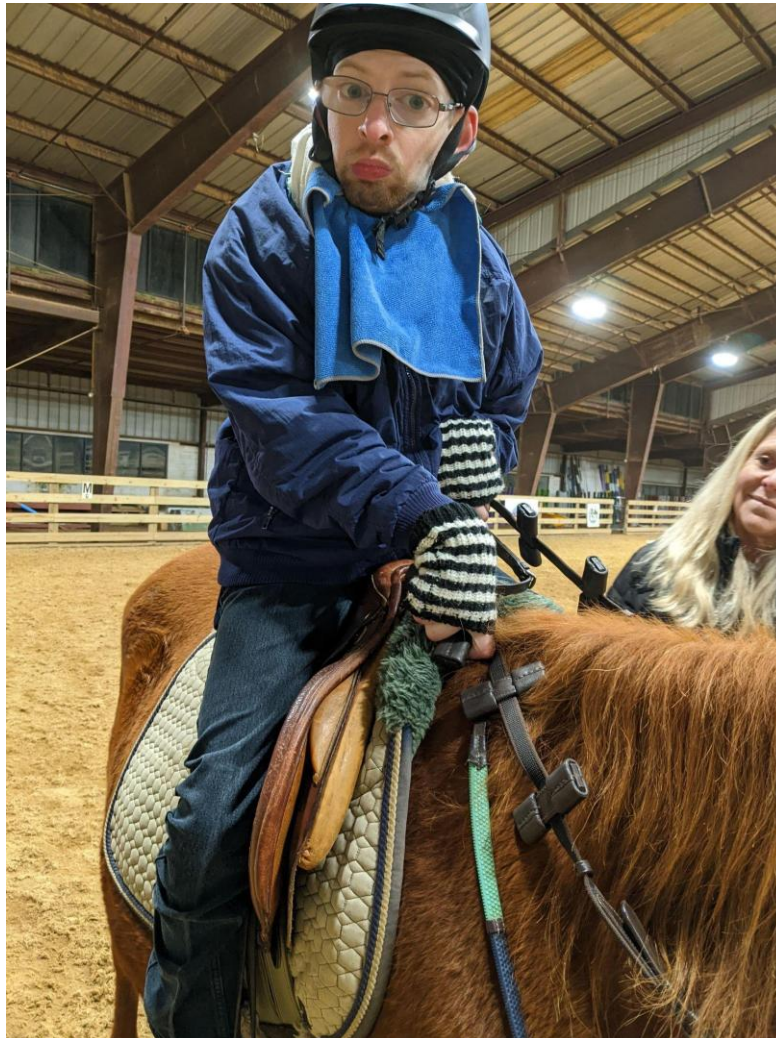
Padded reins, compared to typical leather reins, provide a softer, more secure grip—helping riders stay comfortable, confident, and engaged throughout their lesson.

Impact in practice:

Denese, a rider in her 70s, previously needed frequent breaks due to hand fatigue. With the Heather Comfort Connect Rein, she is now able to sustain rein contact longer, allowing lessons to progress beyond basic control into skill development and confidence-building.

The Aaron-Vale Rein

The **Aaron-Vale Rein** functions as a ladder-style rein with padded hand grips that provide consistent, repeatable hand placement. The adjustable grip positions help riders maintain symmetrical rein length and spatial awareness.



Impact in practice:

Steve previously struggled with inconsistent rein length and hand drift. Using the Aaron-Vale Rein, he can now maintain consistent hand placement, resulting in clearer directional cues and improved steering accuracy.

The Engineering of Access

Each piece of adaptive equipment represents a simple but powerful principle:

When variability in human ability is high, systems must adapt.

These tools allow instructors to tailor support to individual riders, creating safer learning environments while promoting independence, strength, and meaningful participation.

The Impact of Your Generosity

Because of your support, our riders are not limited by what they cannot do. Instead, they are equipped with tools that help them discover what they *can* do.

Each adjustment, each added handle, each redesigned rein creates an opportunity:

- To communicate more clearly
- To move more independently
- To build strength, confidence, and connection

Your investment helps ensure that equine-assisted services remain accessible, inclusive, and transformative for every participant we serve.