

## Mini Horse Helper Program Summary

Mini Horse Helpers is an all-volunteer, non-profit organization created to help fill the need for more human services in rural communities. Our mission is to facilitate relationships between our miniature horses and at-risk children, adults, and families through Equine Assisted Learning (EAL)\*. Our miniature horses are small in size so children find them non-threatening vs. regular sized horses. They are also easier for little arms to hug. Our little horses provide unconditional love and support in times of great stress for children, adults and families. At-risk children are predisposed for problems as adults. When we help them learn effective life skills for problem-solving and successful interactions, we are helping to mitigate those early life experiences and developmental challenges.

Texas Rural Communities Grant funds will be used to underwrite 'mini' day camps for at-risk children. Each 'mini' camp will be two to four hours in length depending on age and number of participants. They will include two to six horses, two to four trained facilitators, materials, and refreshments. Riding is not involved and no horse experience is necessary. Mini Horse Helpers respectfully requests your help with a grant for \$5,000, which would underwrite 20 camps at \$250 for each camp. Since we don't charge our clients for our services, the number of camps we can host is dependent upon donations and grants, so any amount of money given is greatly appreciated. The 'mini' camps will run from January - December 2016.

Each 'mini' camp is uniquely designed for each client involved and is tailored to their needs, through EAL activities. Our EAL trained facilitators work with people of all ages from 5-90 and from all ethnic and economic backgrounds, but mostly from low to middle income. We serve all of Fayette County and the city of Weimar. Our horses go to schools and libraries with our *Pony Tales Literacy Program*, for story time and hands on interaction, and they're involved in 'mini' camps and workshops at the farm for at-risk children, teen groups, and families dealing with autism. In 2015, we reached over 500 people with our programs.

MHH hosted 30 'mini' camps in 2015. Our goal is to host 40+ camps in 2016. With the help of your grant, we expect to achieve that goal. Since we customize the learning activities for each individual client, our expectations will be derived based on their learning need. In general, we have experienced and have received the following feedback from participants, advocates and parents: less stress and frustration and more productive responses to difficult situations, better socialization skills and cooperative behavior with peers, and a strengthening of relationships between participants and therapists. Perhaps most powerful to us is the joy and emotional connection we see between client and horse.

\*EAL refers to activities done with horses geared toward experiential learning. Research has shown that EAL programs significantly improve communication, self-esteem, empathy, tolerance for stress, problem-solving skills, responsibility, teamwork, leadership skills, trust and interpersonal relations.

## Mini Horse Helpers

### Section I: Contact Information

- a. Sally Van Duyn, Executive Director  
230 Hausmann Gin Rd  
La Grange, TX 78948  
Phone: (512) 917-6561  
Email: [minihorsehelpers@gmail.com](mailto:minihorsehelpers@gmail.com)
  
- b. Mini Horse Helpers  
230 Hausmann Gin Rd  
La Grange, TX 78948

### Section II: Organizational Description

- a. Give a brief overview of your organization, including its mission, purpose, a short history and any major accomplishments. Mini Horse Helpers (MHH) is an all-volunteer, non-profit organization founded in 2013 with four horses and three volunteers. It was created to help fill the need for more human services in rural communities. Our mission is to facilitate relationships between our miniature horses and at-risk children, adults, and families in order to provide support, emotional growth, and self-discovery through Equine Assisted Learning (EAL). Today we have grown to eleven horses and an expanded team of volunteers. Our volunteers and Board members include horsewomen, educators, social service providers, a veterinarian, administrators, business professionals, and several physicians. In the last year MHH has 1) worked with 150 children as the social component through SWIFT's Healthy Promotion Tour; 2) have hosted/attended workshops to become further educated about how to use horses with our client population to enhance the learning process and obtain certification; 3) involved over 300 children in our literacy program; and 4) increased service to at-risk children through our partnership with CASA and Turtle Wing.

### Section III: Program Description

- a. What community and/or constituency needs will your program meet? How did you identify the need? Several MHH volunteers are in health and human services in Fayette County and have directly experienced the lack of services for at-risk children and families. MHH was formed to help provide these services in rural communities through interactions with our miniature horses.
  
- b. Give a brief description of your program. What are its primary goals? How will you accomplish them? Mini Horse Helpers has several programs: working with at-risk children and children with Autism and their families, community outreach, and our literacy program. For the grant, MHH is concentrating on expanding our 'Mini' Day Camp Program. We offer 'mini' day camps for at-risk children and families. Our miniature horses become partners and help to bring about emotional growth and discovery. Activities occur on the ground and are designed to build life skills that foster healthy interactions, clear communications, self-confidence, and problem-solving. These skills are often problematic in at-risk children and impede their future success. These camps can be one-

on-one or can involve small groups or families. Depending on the client's needs, they are be between 2-4 hours long. Our primary goal is to help as many children and families as we can by offering several of these camps a month. With the financial support of grants and donations, MHH will achieve this goal. MHH does not want to charge for our services so the number of camps will depend on the grants obtained.

- c. Describe the program participants or beneficiaries. Are you planning to serve people of a particular age group, ethnic background or income level? How many people will your program serve? MHH has strong partnerships with CASA, Turtle Wing, HATCH, Hospice of Brazos Valley, and Fayette County school districts. As of now, all of our clients are referred to us from one of our partner organizations. Our current and past clients range from ages 5-90 and are from all ethnic and economic backgrounds, but mostly low to middle income. They are children with Autism, children who have suffered a loss, or who have been neglected or abused. They are families dealing with autism or people in Hospice care. The amount of people we will serve through this program will depend on how many camps we can offer. Since they are tailored for individuals and families, numbers will vary. A reasonable yearly estimate would be 40-60. Obviously the more camps, the more people. To date through 2015, MHH has offered 30 camps. Our goal for 2016 is 40+ camps. Depending on their individual needs, most of our clients regularly return to the farm to work on their life skills.
- d. Describe the aspects of your program that are unique or innovative. Is your program a model for other communities? How will you communicate your program's success to other communities? Equine Assisted Learning (EAL) refers to activities with horses geared toward experiential learning. Research has shown that equine assisted learning programs significantly improve communication, self-esteem, empathy, tolerance for stress, problem-solving skills, responsibility, teamwork, leadership skills, trust, and interpersonal relationships. In the past EAL has been used with full-sized horses and often involves riding. MHH is using EAL with miniature horses. It is unique in that it doesn't involve riding a horse, so the intimidation factor for most children and even some adults is very minimal. At camp each activity is designed with the needs of the client in mind and every camp is unique to each client. One camp might be for a family with a child with autism concentrating on communication skills by doing activities requiring the child to interact with other family members. For example, passing a horse around an arena requires the child to communicate with the person they are taking the lead rope from and also the person they are passing the lead rope to. Another camp might be for a child who has been neglected and concentrates on trust. For example, leading the horse over simple obstacles then removing the lead rope requiring the child to trust the horse to follow. There are only a handful of organizations like MHH in the US. We are currently servicing all of Fayette County and the city of Weimar. We have been featured in the Fayette County Record, a county wide newspaper, numerous times. Our members attend meetings at our partner organizations and at schools putting our information into the hands of those who need it most.

- f. Describe the expected outcomes or accomplishments for your program. How will you measure these outcomes? With our 'mini' camp program, MHH volunteers and Board expect to grow our client base by providing more 'mini' camps in 2016. We customize the learning activities for each individual participant and therefore expectations will be formulated based on the learning need and program. In general, we have experienced and have received the following feedback from participants, advocates and parents: less stress and frustration and more productive responses to difficult situations, better socialization skills and cooperative behavior with peers, a strengthening of relationships between participants and therapists. Perhaps most powerful to us is the joy and emotional connection we see between participant and horse.
- g. Give a timeline for your project or program and expenditure of proposed grant funds. Camp dates will be scheduled throughout 2016 and offered to individuals and community organizations that are directly involved with at-risk children and children with Autism such as CASA of Bastrop and Turtle Wing Foundation. Needs will be identified for each participant or group and equine activities will be designed to meet those objectives. MHH is respectfully asking for \$5000.00 to offer 20 'mini' day camps at \$250 per camp. Funding for each camp includes: MHH facilities, 2-4 trained facilitators, 2-6 miniature horses, various camp supplies for activities, and refreshments for the client/clients/families. Number of facilitators and horses used will depend on the number of clients and their needs in each camp.
- h. Mini Horse Helpers has not received a grant award from TRC in the past.