An update from True Friends: Spring 2017

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Changing Lives

Just being teenagers

Camp gives sisters the opportunity to just 'be'

Allison and Abigale are not only sisters, they are identical twins. Both Allison and Abigale, along with their younger sister Anna, are first time campers at True Friends.

Allison's favorite memory of being with her twin sister, Abigale, was "when we were adopted and didn't have to be split up."

Allison and Abigale were adopted into a family with six siblings, who all are part of a family band, including their parents. When asked to

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Sisters Allison and Abigale enjoy "being teenagers" at camp.

Ropes Course Earns International Recognition

On Saturday, February 4, 2017 True Friends received the Outstanding Program Impact Award from the Association for Challenge Course Technology (ACCT) for the universal ropes challenge course at Camp Courage in Maple Lake, MN.

The first of its kind in the United States and possibly the world, the universal ropes challenge course at Camp Courage is completely wheelchair accessible giving individuals the opportunity to fly when they are unable to walk. "We are incredibly humbled and honored to receive this award from the ACCT," said Jason Colvin, Manager of Camping at Camp Courage.

Recognition *continued on page 2*

Destination: Sanguaro Desert

Ventures Travel Trip to the Dude Ranch Creates Fast Friends

These two gentleman reunited for another great week of riding in the beautiful Saguaro Desert in Arizona this spring.

Last year the pair became fast friends and talked often of traveling together again.

Both of their care providers commented that they saw such a positive change in each 'cowboy' after the trip and that they are now more social and outgoing.

They were thrilled to be back at the ranch together in 2017.

To learn more about group or custom trips visit venturestravel.org.

Teenagers

...continued from cover story

describe each other in one word, Allison said Abigale is courageous and Abigale then described Allison as outgoing.

Allison and Abigale are active and adventurous teenagers. Their favorite activities at camp include the rock wall, zip lining, camping out, swimming and the mud pit.

At camp they are able to participate in their favorites sports, which are soccer for Abigale and basketball for Allison.

Abigale says "camp is a time to be a teenager and to be able to do what we want." Their favorite activities at camp, that they don't get to do elsewhere, are tie-dying and going in the mud pit.

Being away from home can be difficult, but Allison and Abigale found it hard to leave True Friends at the end of their week.

They were scheduled to return later in the summer for a week of camp at a different True Friends' location.

After falling in love with Camp Friendship and their cabin counselors, they requested to return to Annandale.

Allison said "I like it a lot because the impact my counselors have, it makes me happy and they make me feel important and special."

Allison and Abigale are looking forward to returning to True Friends later in the summer and hopefully again in the coming summers.

Recognition

...continued from cover story

"We saw an opportunity and took action to give individuals a truly life-changing experience to enhance their self-esteem, confidence and overall well-being."

Since opening in June of 2016 the ropes course has logged over 700 climbs with individuals of all ages and abilities.

According to the ACCT the award focuses on the positive impact a program has on an individual "such as helping a therapeutic customer have a major breakthrough or perhaps customers with special needs be able to achieve access they once thought impossible."

For more information about the Challenge Ropes Course at Camp Courage and the opportunities to participate visit team-quest.org.

Changing Lives

True Strides Horse Therapy supports local girl

Everyday True Strides provides individuals the opportunity to enhance their lives. Using specialty therapy programs like hippotherapy, therapeutic riding and myofascial massage the True Strides staff are truly making an impact.

Changing lives for individuals like Eli Hofmeister of Maple Lake. For a couple of hours each week Eli is able to spend a few moments enjoying the experience of riding a horse, instead of focusing solely on her disease.

At the age of 13 Eli was diagnosed with juvenile onset of Huntington's Chorea. She is one of approximately 40 individuals nationwide with the early onset of this disease. She came to True Strides in October 2016 and became a weekly rider in the hippotherapy program.

In a recent interview with the Citizen Tribune in Clearwater, Eli's mother Camille Tulenchik said "Coming to True Strides has made a huge difference."

"Eli is able to walk better, is more confident and her mood had improved," said Tulenchik. "She loves it, she lives for it."

Making Strides

Eli's disease is a genetic neurodevelopmental disease that affects a person's movement, emotions and thinking.

It usually strikes adults and only 5-10% of the population develop symptoms at a young age. The symptoms worsen over time with tight muscles and a decrease in range of motion, strength, and stamina.

Upon arriving at True Strides Eli was experiencing a variety of concerns including a lack of range of motion in her arms, tightness in her back and her gait was out of sync.

Since riding at True Strides and working with Occupational Therapist Shari Mangas and Certified Occupational Therapy Assistant Kim Anderson, Eli has shown dramatic improvements, even noted by her physician.

Mangas and Anderson have implemented a program of myofacial release, stretching, and horseback riding which has changed Eli's quality of life. Eli is able to raise her arms and completes full arm circles. Her gait has improved and she is able to move more efficiently while walking.

Eli Hofmeister visits True Strides weekly for a variety of therapy sessions. Following therapy, Eli volunteers and enjoys spending time with horses like PT Cruiser, a.k.a. Mr. Pete.

"Another key improvement is Eli's ability to move through space looking up and out at her environment instead of at her feet," said Mangas. "This demonstrates that neurological changes have occurred allowing for improved balance and equilibrium reactions."

Beyond Therapy

With therapy being the focus of most of her visits, Eli wanted to get to know the horses a bit more. With her improved functionality and love of horses, Eli is now volunteering at True Strides.

Each week after her lesson, she stays a bit longer to enjoy the horses and give back to the other children who ride at True Strides.

"Eli's kind spirit and never ending smiles keep our staff energized and in wonderful spirits," said Mangas. "She is a true delight."

To learn more about True Strides visit truestrides.org or call 952.852.0126.

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