



LITTLE BITS

THERAPEUTIC RIDING ASSOCIATION
for persons with disabilities

info@littlebits.ca

www.littlebits.ca

November 2013



Remembering

Stan Homan

1946 - 2013

It is with deep sadness that we observe the passing of Stan Homan on October 25, 2013, at the age of 67 years. We are honored that Stan served as a Little Bits volunteer since 1988, an amazing 25 years. Stan's reliability, sincerity and common sense were highly valued; his dedication and caring made a real difference to our riders, whose faces just lit up when they saw him. He will be dearly missed by the entire Little Bits community.

Hoofbeats AND Heartbeats *You're Invited*

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 2013

HOOFBEATS AND HEARTBEATS GALA

AT THE MARRIOTT AT RIVER CREE

TICKETS: \$195, TABLE OF 8: \$1,450, TABLE OF 10: \$1,750

COCKTAIL RECEPTION: 6:00 PM

MUSIC AND ENTERTAINMENT BY EDMONTON'S OWN "HARDLY A BAND"

*To purchase tickets please call 780-435-3597
or visit WELCA.CA*

IN SUPPORT OF WHITEMUD EQUINE LEARNING CENTRE ASSOCIATION

"Where people and horses meet in the heart of the city"

THE HOOFBEATS & HEARTBEATS GALA IS PROUD TO HONOUR A LONGSTANDING PROGRAM AT WELCA, THE LITTLE BITS THERAPEUTIC RIDING ASSOCIATION



On August 27th twenty-six new volunteers attended Volunteer Orientation Night and many decided to participate in our program. Since that time, we've added even more new volunteers. It's been a never-ending supply to add to our ever growing family!

Spring 2014 Volunteer Orientation

Tuesday, March 18th from 7:00 – 9:00 pm

**Information
booklets**

Whitemud Equine Facility

**Hands-on training
with the horses**

Come and learn all about the Little Bits Program!

Additional 2013 Little Bits Sponsors and Donors

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Estate of Lyle Atkinson
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Rex Carey

Our Great Pumpkin

by Jo-Anne Billington



With Halloween in mind, I thought I would tell you about our "Great Pumpkin." If you volunteer on Wednesday evenings you may know him as Stuart, who got his nickname for wearing his orange hoodie!

Stuart has volunteered with Little Bits for over ten years. He may well have started with us to be with the horses, but now I'm sure it's to be with the riders. There are two special people Stuart always likes to work with: Connor, who rides at 5:00; and Greg, who rides at 7:00. He has a special affinity with these two riders and seems to get the best out of them. But any rider who may need his help will find he's ready and willing to lend a hand.

When Stuart started volunteering, his favourite horse was Flossy, a bay mare who had a quirky personality. She was a great mover and it took a special knack to keep her in check. Flossy and Stuart gelled immediately and Stuart was able to help any rider on her. After many years of service at the

Whitemud facility, she has retired to Kath's acreage (Kath is another one of our incredible Tuesday evening volunteers). Another of Stuart's favourite horses may be Coke. Is it because he brings him in for us from the "back forty", as well as turns him out at the end of the night? Or is it because he enjoys the time he lets him graze on the way back to his pasture?

Stuart not only gives his time to us, but also to Canterbury Court, a senior's residence in the west end. He also worked part time at Safeway for a few years. He recently got a new full-time position at Camper's Village. He let his employers know how important Little Bits is to him, and he still manages to volunteer with us -- sometimes even after working a full day!

On the home front, Stuart lives with his parents and his dog Abby. She is a Labradoodle and his best friend. The few times he has had her at the barn, he loved to show off the tricks he has taught her. This demonstrates his great love of animals and may be why he gets along so well with our horses.

Being a big supporter of Little Bits, Stuart has encouraged his friend Taylor to come and volunteer with us on Sundays. Taylor is also a valuable asset to our program!

Why does Stuart keep coming back to volunteer with us? We like to think it is because he truly loves the riders, horses and possibly the staff! Stuart is a caring young man who was raised in a loving family. He would give you the "hoodie" off his back if asked. He will walk in the rain, snow, mud and heat to help the riders, genuinely cares about everyone, and always has a smile on his face.

Thank you Stuart for the many hours of dedication you have given Little Bits. It is people like you who make our program such a success!

Flossy and Friends

by Kath McKenzie



Flossy & Huck

On a very hot day in June 2010, Flossy left Whitemud for her "forever home." Sonja was kind enough to provide transport and moral support, and Kelly was on hand to load Flossy. Flossy gave Kelly a great big hug in the trailer before we left; I know that because I heard Kelly say "Flossy, stop squishing me!"

When we unloaded Flossy, she took a long look around - green grass everywhere! And then she dropped her head and started eating. I don't think she lifted her head for three days. Her

first new friend was Huck, an older Arabian gelding, who fell madly in love with her and never left her side. He taught her the way of the open field and would stand aside until she picked the best stand of grass. Two gentle souls - it was a perfect match.

There was some adjusting to such a new environment. A retirement field is just that - no halters, no ropes, just a wander out to wherever they are with a bucket of brushes. Some days I would be brushing her ... and then brushing thin air. She was off to the middle of the field! It took a few months before she realized that she still had to stand quiet for grooming, and that I was the one who left first. I suspect that without the excellent manners she learned from the wonderful staff at Whitemud, it may not have been as easy as it was.

Her next friend, Willow, arrived in the fall. Think Danny with hormones. A strong willed, but oh so loveable attitude. Flossy liked to retreat to her open air stall at dusk every night. Willow liked to stand in the hollow of the field. Not for long, though. Flossy would fidget about in her stall, peering around the corner to see Willow, and then race out and herd her back to the shed. Those of you who remember how fast Flossy was at the trot will understand why Willow never had a



Flossy & Willow

chance once Flossy started circling. Flossy's first winter outdoors arrived and imagine our surprise to find out that she LOVES snow. Lots of snow! Prancing through it, throwing up big clouds of white, head held high, leaving me in her drifts, so to speak. Maybe there's a bit of Canadian in her.



Flossy & Willow

Her newest friend in the field is Mister Big, a retired performance horse. He is very confident and perfect for Flossy as she gets older. They've had a few adventures in the trees; Mister is very good at weaving in and out of the trees, Flossy not so much. Some mornings she'll be at the fence with twigs in her mane and a few scratches on her hips, obviously in a place where she Didn't Quite Fit. One evening we were just getting ready for bed and heard a loud whinny from the field. My daughter Danielle and I met at the door, scrambling to put boots and coats on

and looking for the flashlight. Mister was running about the field in a panic and Flossy was nowhere to be found! We called her and heard rustling in the trees. Out she ambled, wondering what the fuss was all about. Likely, Mister had been sleeping in the shed and Flossy had decided to go off trail on her own. Life with old folks - never boring.

Flossy has been with us now for three years and has touched the hearts of many. Her special friend is Cheryl, who visits her regularly and is her co-sponsor, providing support for her medical and maintenance costs. Our neighbours bring grandchildren or visitors over to visit. She has a warmth and kindness to her that puts everyone at ease -- a true therapy horse and a very special soul. And the kindest horse I have ever known. Thank you, Flossy. Thank you.



Mister Big & Flossy

Blu's Journey

by Trish Weymouth

Many of you know our boy Blu. Born on April 11, 1991, he's now 22 years old. He is a grey Registered Quarter Horse gelding.

Blu was purchased by a couple when he was two years old. Once trained, he spent his days trail riding in the mountains, giving young children rides also and also participating in Cancer research fundraising rides. Blu was a willing participant in all he did while living in Rochester, Alberta.

Approximately 2 years ago, Blu could no longer do the long 7-hour trail rides, so his owners contacted Whitemud Equine Centre. They had heard about a program called Little Bits and wanted him to come live here. The veterinarian cleared him for the work, with the only stipulation being that Blu is no longer allowed to canter. After Blu arrived, he was put through the paces and being such a willing participant, he works hard and never seems to have a care in the world.

I was partnered with Blu in July of 2013 as his human buddy. He stole my heart the first day I worked with him. He loves to spend time grazing and being out in the sunshine. He loves when I give him massages and is a captive audience to hear about my day! I love coming to see him and we just spend time hanging out. I have had the pleasure of riding Blu a few times and he is smooth as a limousine car ride. He can be bit naughty when it's time to saddle up and even though he likes the attention ... he likes to ... shall I say ... taste the odd human! He makes me laugh!

Once Blu is working, his mind is all on his job. I have even had him come to a complete stop when the child who was riding at the time became agitated. Blu did not move until we figured out the problem and his rider was happy once again. I think he wants to be sure the human on his back is safe at all times.

I like to joke and tell the kids that he is a white horse, who is actually a grey and his name is Blu! I always get a chuckle over that. None of us could enjoy what we do without these brave, hard-working animals. Blu is a star, and I am so blessed to be his friend!



“You'll Never Catch Me Up On One of Those Horses!”

by Gwen McDonald Halabisky

There are volunteers ... and then there is Sandy Harrod. When I met Sandy about 15 years ago, she was already a valued old-timer with the Little Bits program. Her friendly demeanour and helpful manner made it easier for me to learn the ropes of barn and arena duties. Shortly after meeting Sandy, she suggested I join her at the Canadian Finals Rodeo to help sell programs, one of the many Little Bits fundraisers at the time. I was looking for her at the rodeo and noticed a sophisticated lady who looked familiar; she gave her warm smile and I realized it was Sandy in dress-up clothes.



Sandy became a volunteer with Little Bits shortly after attending a volunteer centre where she told them she had taught swimming to special needs people and wanted to find a program to again work with children or adults with special needs. The centre suggested Little Bits. Unlike many who are horse people or like me (a horse wannabe person), Sandy is not interested in riding a horse. However, because a horse is an animal and she is an animal lover, Sandy thought she would give it a try. She has not looked back.

Sandy came after work on Tuesday and Wednesday evenings the first few years. After her retirement, she also started volunteering on Tuesday mornings. Sandy also volunteers at St Joseph's Hospital on Wednesdays and Fridays where she assists with physio-therapy and takes her dog into the palliative care ward.

Some of Sandy's fond memories at Little Bits are:

- A horse named Cody who would do anything asked of him.
- A little girl who would try to make her horse jump every chance she got.
- A student Brian, who later became a therapy teacher, who would encourage children to get their new cowboy boots dirty.

Sandy admires the determination of the riders and the dedication of the parents and support people. What I have noticed mostly about Sandy is her sensitivity toward the riders and her change of behaviour depending on a rider's skill and mood any given day. It is an honour to volunteer with such a caring person as Sandy. If she stopped coming to Little Bits, she would miss HER "kids" too much, so I'm sure we will continue to see her here for several more years.

Spring 2014 Riding Sessions

Sundays: March 30th to June 22nd (except May 18th)

Tuesdays: April 1st to June 17th

Wednesdays: April 2nd to June 18th

Amissa's Story

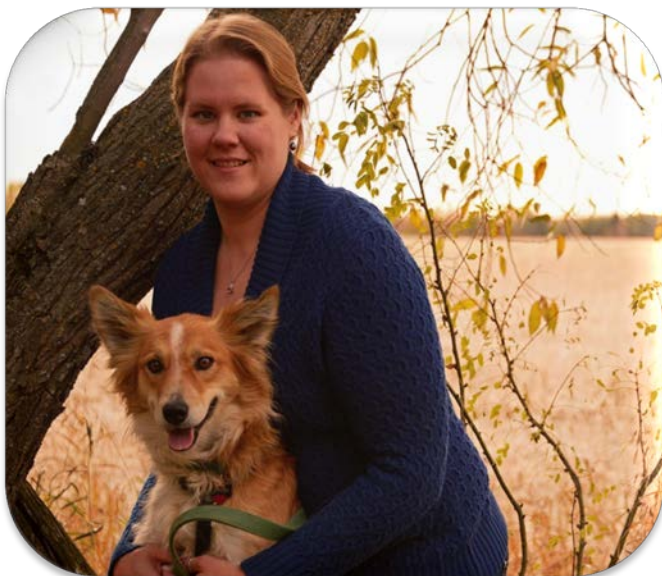
by Amissa Jablonski

Little Bits is one of the highlights of my week. I consider myself so lucky to have found such a fulfilling, challenging and fun volunteer opportunity. I wasn't really sure what I was getting into five years ago, but I soon realized that Little Bits was the place for me.

I was just starting a new management role with the University of Alberta Students' Union when I noticed the sign for Little Bits along Fox Drive. I was always a 'horse girl' growing up and thought that this might be a chance to hang out with horses on a regular basis. I grew up on a farm just outside of Thorsby, AB (45 minutes southwest of Edmonton) and we had a couple of horses. One had already passed on and the other was well into retirement, so I was craving company of the equine variety. Little did I know that the riders of Little Bits would soon become a passion.

In my very first lesson, I was paired with Val and Joker. It was a very steep learning curve, as it is for all new volunteers. First of all, I had never actually seen an English saddle up close before and the bridles looked very different from those I used. After a couple of lessons, things started to get more familiar and I was really enjoying myself. That chance pairing with Val has turned into a five-year partnership and it is amazing to see the changes in her riding. The development of such partnerships is definitely what keeps me coming back each year. Whether it is using the green glove for 'walk on' with Val, being on the 'A-Team' with Arden, practicing my super rusty French with Andre, or helping Emily with 'flying', these connections are what I consider to be the most rewarding part of this experience!

Little Bits is a commitment that I always make time for in my schedule. I currently work for the U of A Senate, running a program called U School. U School brings classes from grades 4-9 from socially vulnerable and/or rural schools to the U of A for a week of sessions directly related to Alberta curriculum. This job keeps me busy for most of the week and I believe that volunteering with Little Bits actually makes me better at it. Every week in the arena or on the trails, I get a reminder of how impactful small moments are in the lives of our riders and it helps me make sure I am creating programming for my U School students that gives them those moments as well.



Aside from working with kids and hanging out with horses, I really enjoy visiting my parents' farm with my adopted border collie, Fawkes, and my little niece and nephew (who I am turning into little horse people). Learning has always been a great joy in my life and I am very, very slowly working on my MA in Political Science at the U of A (adding to my BSc in Pharmacology and BEd in Elementary Studies). This Masters program gives me an excuse to keep up on all the news out of Ottawa and Washington, D.C., feeding my addiction to politics. Above all, I remain horse-crazy and can't wait to have enough money to afford a great big Friesian. Until then, I will settle for hanging out with Joker, Dandy, Kris, Bliss & Mandy!

Volunteering with Little Bits

by Camila Hurtado

I lived on a farm for most of my childhood, where I was constantly in contact with horses. I grew to love them, which is why when we moved to Canada and had to leave everything behind I immediately looked for ways that would allow me to be around them, but at the same time I wanted to become involved in my community. While looking for ways to get involved I also found a new passion, helping people with disabilities. I started working with autistic children, and was surprised by how much I learned and how much fun I had being with them. When I heard about Little Bits, it opened my eyes to the possibility of joining these two passions.

I was not really sure what to expect from Little Bits when I started, but as I got more comfortable with the kids and the horses I began to look at it more like a fun way to spend my Sunday mornings rather than as a volunteer job. I never expected that I was going to be able to wake up early on the weekends to volunteer, but I find that every Sunday I wake up with more energy and desire to share my time with the kids and horses.

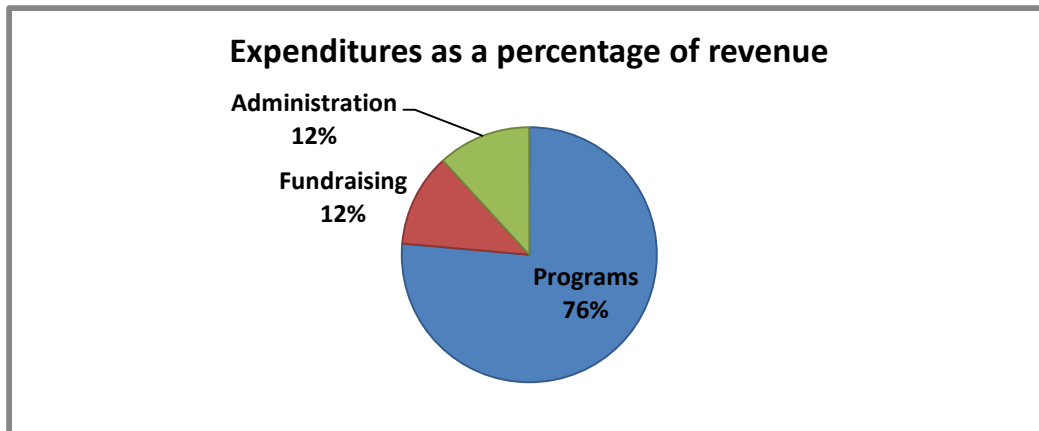


I have come to know many of the riders, which has allowed me to see their progress through the years; I've been deeply amazed by what an hour a week of riding can do to help them. Though their progress through the years is amazing, it is the little things each day that make this volunteer experience so special, such as seeing and experiencing the joy the riders get when they mount a horse or when they go trotting. Knowing that I help these little moments of joy happen just makes the experience that much more valuable. Even the simple "thank you high-five" from the kids at the end of each ride reinforces my desire to come back every weekend.

I have not only had a chance to know the kids, but I have also become close to the horses. I mostly work with Caffi and because of this I know his personality very well. I know many of the other horses, too, and have come to care for all of them very much. If I was asked for a favourite, I think it would be hard to just choose one, because although they are very different from one another, they are all very special.

Little Bits has been a wonderful and fulfilling experience that has allowed me to grow in many ways. I always look forward the classes and hope that they never end.

Donation Form



Please fill in the following form and enclose it with your donation to:

Little Bits Therapeutic Riding Association
Box 29016 Lendrum P.O.
Edmonton, AB T6H 5Z6

Phone: 780-476-1233 **Fax:** 780-476-7252 **E-mail:** info@littlebits.ca

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Please visit www.littlebits.ca to make a donation online through CanadaHelps.org

YES! I would like to help make a wish come true!
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I would prefer my contribution to be used:

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- ☐ Where it is needed most
- ☐ Cheque enclosed ☐ Cash enclosed
- ☐ I would like a tax receipt
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