

A Second Chance



FAMOUS CIRCUS PERFORMER JOSEPHINE DEMOTT ROBINSON ONCE SAID, “HORSES AND CHILDREN, I OFTEN THINK, HAVE A LOT OF THE GOOD SENSE THERE IS IN THE WORLD.” WITH THE CREATION OF CHANCE’S FUND, A NONPROFIT DESIGNED TO HELP HORSES, YOUNGSTER SKYLER NUÑEZ IS PROVING ROBINSON’S POINT.

Story by Melissa Larsen / Photographed by Chris Loomis

WHEN WADDELL’S SKYLER NUÑEZ turned 10 years old, he received a birthday gift that wasn’t wrapped in bows: His parents presented him with Chance, a 20-year-old rescued rodeo horse. Chance was a gentle giant from Wickenburg and suffered from badly infected feet; unfortunately, after Skyler (now 12) cared for the equine for nearly a year, Chance passed away. “We gave him a year of kisses and hugs, and he taught us how to take care of horses and [how to] work with them,” says Meloney Nuñez, Skyler’s mom. After the loss of his beloved buddy, Skyler knew he wanted to help other equines who were in need. Now, with the aid of his mother, Skyler is spreading the word about his new pony-friendly nonprofit: Chance’s Fund.

When Skyler first had the inkling to assist these grandiose creatures, he had never even heard of a nonprofit and had no idea what one did. He just wanted “to get enough money to save horses and buy them hay,” he says. But since starting Chance’s Fund last October, Skyler and Meloney have done much more than fill troughs with food. So far, the Nuñezes have helped three horses who might have otherwise been put down due to illness, neglect or age. To nurture the creatures, the family provided them with medicine, helped pay for veterinary bills and gave them lots of tender loving care and a place to call home. “Horses that are just left to the pasture—who are not ridden or loved—are sad,” says Meloney, who owned a horse as a young girl. “They love to interact with kids and get attention.”

Through the nonprofit, the mother-and-son team also assist other local horse-related agencies (see sidebar on next page) and provide scholarship funds to children and families who can’t afford the benefits of equine-assisted therapy or equine-assisted learning. As the term implies, this therapy utilizes horses to facilitate emotional growth and learning. Meloney, who is certified in the therapy and holds degrees in counseling and education, learned the healing power of horses and equine-assisted therapy while working with eating-disorder patients at Remuda Ranch. “The horses are a mirror of what the person is feeling and reflected within themselves,” she explains. “If you have a bad attitude, the [horse] is going to give bad attitude back. It is an amazing tool. You can’t do that in an office; we can talk about it, but I can’t give them a visualization of what they are doing [like when a horse is present].” So, at the time Skyler started Chance’s Fund, his mother started her company, Healing Reigns.

Through Healing Reigns, Meloney, along with a horse specialist, helps students, children, families and professionals gain confidence and self-esteem, improve communication and get personal insight using groundwork exercises with the creatures (no actual horseback riding is involved). There was one recent instance, in particular, that Meloney holds especially close to her heart: When a group of eighth-grade students visited Healing Reigns, one boy in the group was terrified of the horses and was experiencing extreme anger problems at home. “He realized his fear of the horses and how he had to address the horses,” she says. “He said it helped him with his anger issues and how to understand other people. He really had to understand the horses before he was successful [in that].”

Even though Skyler’s nonprofit, as well as his mom’s company Healing Reigns, haven’t been around long, the young buck is certain that horses will always be in his life—he is even taking natural horsemanship lessons in hopes of becoming a trainer one day and is saving his own money to contribute to Chance’s Fund (Skyler also says his proud grandfather is one of his biggest supporters). And though the sixth grader may be shy when receiving praise for launching a bighearted organization at such a young age, he is straightforward when asked what the most rewarding part of Chance’s Fund is: “Saving horses.” ■

How You Can Help

In order to raise funds to help horses in need and provide scholarship money to families and children who could not otherwise afford equine-assisted therapy, cowboy artist Mike Scovel created “Reflections,” a chart that illustrates different emotions from the eyes of therapy horse Dakota. For each poster sold, \$5 will be donated to **CHANCE’S FUND**. (The Nuñez family’s goal is to sell 200,000 posters in order to raise \$1 million for the organization.) The Nuñezes are also looking for additional ranch land on which to house the horses they aid. **623.935.5805, www.healingreigns.com**.

HORSE SENSE

Chance’s Fund isn’t the only locally based organization that likes to horse around. Tucson’s Desert Dove Farm and the Horse Rescue of North Scottsdale also specialize in assisting the majestic four-legged creatures—and enabling them to help people via equine-assisted therapy.

Desert Dove Farm
520.444.3683,
www.desertdovefarm.net.

Horse Rescue of North Scottsdale 602.689.8825,
www.rescueahorse.com.

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