



LITTLE BITS

THERAPEUTIC RIDING ASSOCIATION
for persons with disabilities

info@littlebits.ca

www.littlebits.ca

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A riding group at the new St. Albert Facility

Message From the Chair

By Cynthia Dickins (Chair of the Board of Directors)

For over 10 years, Little Bits Strategic Plan has included a goal of expanding its riding programs to a satellite facility. That goal is finally being achieved in 2011 through the launch of a riding program at Horse Sence Training & Petting Zoo in St. Albert. The Whitemud Little Bits program is at full capacity and we have added over 30 riders in the new St. Albert Little Bits program. We are extremely proud of our riders at both locations. We are always happy to have the public see our programs

in action, as our riders work towards their goals and have fun. I hope you will attend the June 11th Opening Celebration at Horse Sence in St. Albert. The same wonderful therapeutic riding program that Little Bits has been running at Whitemud for over 30 years is now up and running, with similarly dedicated volunteers and staff.

“ I hope you will attend the June 11th Opening Celebration at Horse Sence in St. Albert ”

Little Bits requires generous donation of funds to sustain our charitable organization. The riding program is more than 50% subsidized for our riders by Little Bits. The yearly subsidy provided by LBTRA is currently over \$1,000.00 per rider. Funding is needed for day-to-day operations, including cost of leasing horses and arena time, riding instructors, insurance, riding tack, etc., and to expand and enhance the program. We could not afford to run our programs without the support of a large number of dedicated volunteers. Little Bits is so fortunate to have such wonderful volunteers.

The high cost of riding is a barrier to participation for many families struggling with additional medical, transportation and care-giving costs associated with having a child with a disability, thus the *[continued on page 2]*

Message From the Chair cont'd

Board of Little Bits provides the "Tuffy Fund" to assist a few families each year with the full cost of our riding program.

I am a parent of a rider at Little Bits, who has enjoyed this wonderful program for over 16 years. Seeing the joy in our riders' faces and watching them develop greater strength, flexibility, confidence and skills enables others to appreciate the benefits of our program. We will be seeking feedback from our riders at the end of Spring session, to ensure that we are meeting the needs of our diverse age groups and range of abilities.

Little Bits is planning to continue expanding Little Bits riding programs, to address the waiting list of individuals wanting to ride with Little Bits and to open up opportunities for communities surrounding Edmonton. Many exciting opportunities and challenges await Little Bits in the next few years and we need support from you as we move forward!

Little Bits St. Albert Grand Opening

When: Saturday, June 11
12pm-2:30pm

Where: Horse Sense Training & Petting Zoo
54410 Range Road 255
Sturgeon County, AB

Free hot dogs, lemonade, and cake!
Please RSVP to info@littlebits.ca
or (780) 476-1233

Message from Roxanne Parker

By Roxanne Parker

(St. Albert Program Administrator and Lead Instructor)



Roxanne Parker (left) leading a class at the new St. Albert location

*Roxanne Parker has been involved with horses and riding most of her life and enjoys working with people, animals and being outdoors. Roxanne's passion for working with horses and individuals with disabilities led her to become a **CanTRA** certified instructor. This certification gives her a better understanding of Little Bits' needs when acting as the program administrator and lead instructor at the new satellite location in St. Albert. Being a **CanTRA** instructor has allowed her to pursue a career combining all of the things she loves most in life.*

The spring riding session at the new satellite location in St. Albert has been a great success. The new satellite location is located at Horse Sense and is perfect for the Little Bits program, offering large clean bright indoor facilities, trails and a petting zoo which both riders and their families seem to enjoy. The barn managers and staff are very knowledgeable and helpful and have been very accommodating to the Little Bits program. Both riders, families and volunteers are enjoying their time with Little Bits at Horse Sense, and have given both encouraging and positive feedback. The riders out at Horse Sense are gaining a lot of confidence through riding, and they look forward to their next riding lesson as well as continuing in the fall.

There are currently two other instructors in training to become **CanTRA** certified to accommodate the expanding program in St. Albert. Helen Lomas, the volunteer coordinator, has done a fantastic job in her new role. She has been working very hard to recruit new volunteers.

We are having a great time out at Horse Sense and are happy we were able to expand the program to more riders!

An Introduction to Helen Lomas

By Helen Lomas (St. Albert Little Bits Volunteer Coordinator)



Helen riding Skip, a TB gelding

My name is Helen Lomas and I am the Volunteer Coordinator for the new Little Bits program operating from Horse Sense Training and Petting Zoo, just north of St. Albert. I moved to Alberta from England with my family in 2005 as a chance to move out of corporate life. In England I had worked as an accountant for 20 years. I now have the privilege of owning three horses, two llamas, three dogs and four cats on an acreage north of Stony Plain.

Since moving to Canada I have had the chance to try different jobs which have ranged from portrait photography in a Walmart store, where the patience of a Saint is a definite asset, to running the last two census counts for the City of Spruce Grove.

I first became aware of riding programs for persons with disabilities back in the 1970's courtesy of the British children's TV show Blue Peter. The show raised funds by collecting used clothes to purchase and train a four year old Connemara pony which the viewers then called Rags. The pony was presented to HRH Princess Ann, the President of the Riding for Disabled Association. I also used to be a helper at Lower Bell Riding School near Maidstone, which had a weekly riding lesson for adults with learning difficulties. Riding was something they could enjoy whilst getting exercise, fresh air and building friendships. One of the instructors at the riding school was a lovely gentleman with a prosthetic arm who was able to complete all the barn chores with a change of hook or

other attachment. Despite his arm he continued to ride out on the trails and assist beginners and small children to mount their horses.

So how is our new program going? Having started with no volunteers and riders, we now have four lessons running on Saturday afternoons and three on Mondays with a full complement of leaders, side-walkers and enthusiastic barn workers to assist the keen riders. A few riders and volunteers have joined us at St. Albert from Whitemud, but the majority are new to the program and certainly seem to enjoy the experience, especially performing "round the world" and backwards riding. The horses are all well behaved and have their own fan base with a few riders falling in love with their mount.

The best part of my job is definitely interacting with the volunteers who all bring something special - whether it's a former Little Bits rider who is now a valued side walker and leader, the ladies who are so cheerful whether they are leading, walking or sweeping, or our seniors, who love working with the children. Our younger crew works hard and I'm sure will gain valuable experience working with such a diverse group of riders and volunteers. Seeing the riders smile certainly makes the few weeks before we started - where I was never sure when we were going to have enough volunteers - worthwhile. I look forward to the rest of the spring session and planning ahead for the fall!



Riders and side-walkers at the new St. Albert location

Second Annual Bits N' Bites Breakfast a Success

By Olena Dudych (Administrative Officer)

Last St. Patrick's Day (March 17th, 2011) despite the early morning and unexpected snowfall, Little Bits successfully hosted its second annual Little Bits N' Bites Breakfast at Delta Centre Suite Hotel.

Gord Matthews and his daughter, as well as a rider, Shaun Russenholt, created a wonderful atmosphere with their guitar, violin and singing as the guests arrived. Jackie Rae Greening and Dr. Bob Steadward, masters of ceremony at the event, did a wonderful job entertaining all the guests!

Keith Evans and Pam McCulloch from the Edmonton Northeast Rotary Club presented Little Bits with \$1,000 donation and Barbara Few presented a \$2,500 cheque on behalf of the Alberta Trail Riding Association. We wish to express our appreciation to these organizations and to all of the numerous

individuals and businesses who made donations in support of the Little Bits program at the breakfast. Over \$14,000 was raised that day!

Thanks also go to Honorary Patron of Little Bits, Marie Stelmach, who attended the breakfast and gave an inspiring speech. Aimee Anderson, mother of rider Casey Anderson, also told the attendees about her son's benefits and enjoyment from many years of riding with Little Bits.

Jokes flowed as freely as the coffee, while everyone reflected on the Little Bits Program. The most charming moment of the breakfast was the introduction of a 5 year old Little Bits rider, Skyler Jepson, who was not shy at all to speak in front of 300 guests! Skyler not only told

everyone about his love for horses, but charmed everyone with his infectious laugh. Skyler also told us about his 10 year old brother Sage, who plans to volunteer with Little Bits when he turns 14.

Little Bits Therapeutic Riding Association's volunteer, Jessie Brownrigg, touched the hearts of all the guests by singing and playing her guitar while a video of our riders played. How grateful we are to have Jessie as a Little Bits volunteer; just last September Jessie organized an open mic night and raffle at the Druid bar, which raised over \$1000!

Special thanks to Raj Boora (Special Man Production Photography) for making this morning memorable with his photos.

Thank you to all the guests and supporters of Bits N' Bites 2nd Annual Breakfast!!!



Marie Stelmach giving her speech



Keith Evans and Pam McCulloch presenting a donation for Little Bits



Jackie Rae Greening responding to the quick wit of rider Skyler Jepson

Philip Ross: 2011 Tuffy Fund Recipient

By Sheryl Ross



Rider Philip Ross enjoying the comforts of home

Congratulations to Philip Ross: 2011 Tuffy Fund Recipient. Following is the request letter (edited for length) from Philip's mother, Sheryl Ross. Sheryl's dedication to her son and Philip's perseverance are a lesson to us all.

Philip's riding fees will be covered by Little Bits for the Spring 2011 session.

My name is Sheryl Ross, my son, Philip, has been a rider with Little Bits Therapeutic Riding Association since June of 2003 (10 years of age). Philip was immediately enchanted with the entire experience. Our family enjoys volunteering every year at Daisy Days, Achievement Days or the rodeo, and Philip has always raised funds for Achievement Days.

We all love animals of every kind. I was an Animal Health Technologist for many years prior to becoming a nurse; I truly feel animals enrich our lives and are extremely therapeutic for all people. People with special needs, like Philip, receive unconditional acceptance and connection with animals. His pets are a great motivator for him. Philip is especially fond of horses; I discovered in 2005 that the meaning of the name 'Philip' is "lover of horses!"

Philip suffered a brain injury at birth due to fetal distress. He has epilepsy and is also diagnosed with autism. Due to these health concerns Philip has very few activities he is able to participate in, and the benefits of horseback riding with Little Bits is immeasurable. Gross and fine motor development, visual/spatial skills, sequenced tasks & memory, goal setting, transitions, following directions, responsibility, empathy and problem solving.

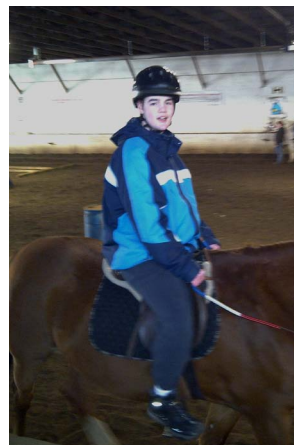
Philip has very little independence in any aspect of his life, not by choice, but due to his severe health concerns. Being able to ride, direct and 'steer' a horse gives Philip a sense of independence, control and satisfaction he rarely experiences. It has improved his self-esteem immensely and has formed long-term friendships with fellow riders, the staff and volunteers. May I say, you have some of the finest volunteers and staff (Joanne, Linda, Ros, leaders, side-walkers, etc...) we have ever encountered. They are to be commended for their tireless commitment and achievements!

In the last few years, Philip's immunity and general health has deteriorated. Over this time, Philip has spent large periods in the hospital and bedridden. Nonetheless, Philip has faced all of these recent challenges with bravery, a positive attitude and grace.

During this time I was forced to take extended periods off work, making my financial situation more difficult. In response to the financial changes, I gently suggested to Philip that perhaps it was time to give a new rider a chance...(I didn't want him to know that it was due to financial reasons). He was, and is, adamant that horseback riding is very important - the highlight of his week! It really is an amazing program, and I am very grateful that we have enjoyed the benefits of LBTRA. Any assistance with the cost would be greatly appreciated.

Thank you for your consideration,

Sheryl Ross (on behalf of Philip Ross).



Philip riding at the Whitemud facility

Board Member Profile: Julia Johnson

By Julia Johnson

My name is Julia Johnson, and I am one of twelve volunteers who sit on the Little Bits Board of Directors. My daughter, Emily, has been riding with Little Bits since 2001.

I joined the board in July 2009 in order to support one of my daughter's favorite activities. In addition to bringing another parent's perspective to the board, I thought my MBA and previous board experience with the United Way in Lethbridge would be useful. I am currently a sessional instructor with NorQuest College in the Business Administration program.

Since joining the board, I have worked on the Strategic Planning, Fundraising, and Satellite Riding Facility Committees. I have helped with the Bits and Bites Breakfast and Daisy Days. I am now the chair of the Riding Committee. I ask that you please participate in an upcoming survey seeking feedback about our riding program. At any time, I welcome your suggestions on improving our program. I would also encourage other parents to become involved with Little Bits through work on committees.

Volunteer Profile: Kathy McIvor

By Kathy McIvor

I have been a friend of Little Bits rider Michael Yaceyko's Mom, Evelyn, for over 28 years. Evelyn and I met while working at ATB around 1983 and although we both moved around with our jobs, we remained friends over the years. Evelyn asked me one year if I would be willing to work at the Canadian Finals Rodeo with her, because Evelyn's husband Richard could not. I agreed, somewhat reluctantly. I sold programs the first year, now over 10 years ago, and found that it was a very enjoyable day. I told Evelyn that she could ask me any time to help out. It became a tradition every year, that Evelyn invited me to join her in Little Bits fundraising events. I also worked for Little Bits as a volunteer at Daisy Days. As the years went by, Evelyn and I worked several shifts at the rodeo, selling programs, doing cash reconciliation and making sure the programs were ready to go and counted. At some point I offered, with Evelyn's help, to do the cash job for all 6 shifts at CFR. Little Bits quickly jumped at the offer.

I understand the benefits of Little Bits, from the stories I have heard from parents and others. Mostly, I understand from seeing the benefits and opportunities it has given rider Michael Yaceyko over the years, contributing to Michael becoming a successful young man.

Kathy is a special person, someone who takes vacation time from her full time job to volunteer for Little Bits each November. Kathy now works in Calgary, but for the past 4 years, she has come up to Edmonton to handle the cash desk for Little Bits at CFR, one of Little Bits' key fundraising events.

Kathy finds volunteer work rewarding, not only for the organization, which benefits from volunteers' efforts, but rewarding for herself. Over more than 10 years helping Little Bits, Kathy has met a lot of wonderful people and she can see that her help is needed. Kathy knows how much her long-time friend Evelyn appreciates Kathy's help. At Little Bits, we salute an outstanding volunteer: Kathy McIvor.

We Couldn't Do It Without Volunteers

By Petra Schulz

(Volunteer Coordinator, Whitemud Equine Centre)

With the spring riding session at the Whitemud Equine Centre in full swing, it takes an amazing 160 volunteers to keep 115 riders in the saddle. Most volunteers lead or sidewalk to keep riders safely mounted, and while some ride almost independently, others need 3 volunteers throughout the entire session. Anyone who has ever walked on a beach for an hour knows that walking in an arena is a good workout, especially when giving hands on support next to a tall horse. Consequently, many volunteers alternate between leading or side walking, and helping to groom and tack.

Let me introduce you to some of these fine people. There is a core group of volunteers that have come for many years, often for two or more sessions a week. A group of 'regulars' on Tuesday mornings wisely show new volunteers how it is done. After riding they head for a weekly lunch together. One of those long-term volunteers is Stan, who does not let health challenges stop him, and while he can't sidewalk, he is active in the barn and expertly assists the instructors in mounting riders. Several young women who started to volunteer in their early teens still come for every session; in the beginning to groom and tack, and now to help in the arena. Another volunteer, Wes, is a little beyond his teens and has helped in the barn for many years. He has one rider he always sidewalks with, and any volunteer coordinator should be aware that this match is written in stone. Finally, who would argue with Sarah, who announced that she would clean up the volunteer room twice a week?

Some of the new volunteers include Riley, who is in between finishing her education and moving to Saskatoon next month. Riley fills her time by walking, leading and grooming several times a week for entire shifts. There is Tami and Jim, who spend quality time as a couple volunteering twice a week (and racking up hours so their company will donate to Little Bits). Owen recently moved here from Barbados where he

had his own construction company. Not only does he help out with Little Bits, he also showed up, measuring tape and clipboard in hand, to see what repairs needed to get done at the facility. Michelle and Kendra do not let allergies stop them from volunteering, armed with medication they are there every week. Kari is a well known artist who sets her paint brushes aside a few hours a week to be with our riders.

As a new volunteer coordinator I am privileged to work with these wonderful people, and get closer to riders and their families. While I am not new to Little Bits, having been on the Board of Directors for 10 years and in charge of the newsletter for much of that time, I am learning to see Little Bits from a new and very enjoyable angle.



Riders and volunteers enjoying the Whitemud facility - outside and in



Thank You to Our Donors

*Little Bits would not be what it is today without you.
Every donation makes a difference.*



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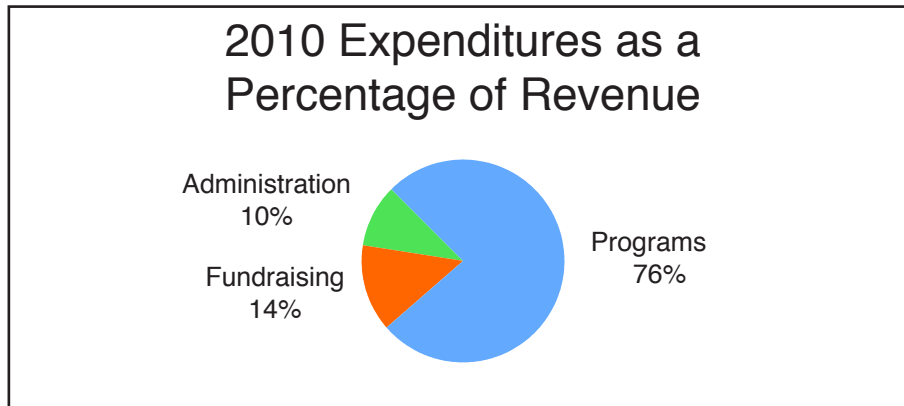
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Phone: 780-476-1233 Fax: 888-398-4003 E-mail: info@littlebits.ca

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\$ _____

I would prefer my contribution to be used:

- To sponsor a rider To sponsor a horse Where it is needed most
 Cheque enclosed Cash enclosed
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Please visit www.littlebits.ca to make a donation online through CanadaHelps.org

(Please make cheques payable to: Little Bits Therapeutic Riding Association)

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