



CITY TO SADDLE

...give a child a leg up!

Read to Ride

written by City to Saddle Volunteer and Administrator, Leonora Giguere



City to Saddle's mission is simple: Providing underserved youth funding and access to horsemanship programs. Most often, CTS children attend summer equestrian day camp programs. They learn many wonderful things, including the basics of riding a horse. This alone can be a huge event in a child's life, but why should it stop there? Horses can become a powerful motivator for some children. The excitement of spending time with them, riding them, and learning about them encourages self discipline, goal setting and even academic improvement.

In 2010, I received a small grant through the program services of Upland Gardens Affordable Housing in Worcester, MA to work with a group of children as a reading consultant. Each week, this group of seven girls and I gather to read together. They work on reading aloud, creative writing, spelling and vocabulary while learning about one of their favorite things. Horses!

Periodically, we make a trip to Mesa Farm in Rutland, MA where owner Dale Perkins treats them to a few hours of fun on the farm. The girls visit the goats, sheep and chickens, pick a treat from the garden, and best of all, ride one of the farms many gentle horses. These trips serve many purposes. They are a reward for work well done. They are fuel for creative expression afterward. They make these children feel special and valued. Most of all, they help foster a sense of empowerment.

"Today I learned to face my fear about horses because, sometimes I'm not the only one who is afraid, including the horse."

This quote came from a paper written by a Read to Ride student. I was lucky enough to have helped her with her first ride. She was terrified, but she wanted the experience so badly that she trusted me and her patient mount, *Ginger*, to keep her safe. It was really hard for her, but within 15 minutes, she was sitting tall and smiling.

Guess what she wrote as her goal for her next visit? "Next time I come to the farm I would like to trot on Jake and I would like to ride on all of the horses." Keep in mind that Jake is a full draft horse standing almost 17 hands tall. I will be honored to be there when she reaches her goal.

If you would like to know more about this program or donate a much needed book, please contact Leonora Giguere at leonora@citytosaddle.org

