



~Inspiring Unbridled Joy~

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November 23, 2020

"A connection is the energy that exists between two people when they feel seen, heard, and valued; when they can give and receive without judgement and when they derive sustenance and strength from the relationship."

-Brene Brown

Dear Friend,

I hope this letter finds you and those you love healthy and safe.

Each and every one of us have had our lives impacted by the pandemic in some way and we're mourning the lives we led prior to it. Feeling isolated and anxious—having to limit where we go and who we see—I don't think I ever truly understood how important social connections are until this year.

Social connection improves physical health and mental and emotional well-being.

Now, imagine living with a disability that limits where you are able to go ALL of the time—pandemic or not. Then, imagine how it would feel if the few places you were able to go and activities you were able to participate in are no longer available.

What if the only opportunity you had to interact and connect with people was no longer there?

During the stay-at-home order earlier in the year, the Main Stay staff understood just how important it was for clients to still feel a connection to the farm. We created virtual experiences that we sent out multiple times a week from March-June that included exercises, meditations and book readings all with our special animals. We also kept them in touch with the farm by sharing animal care videos with our barn staff and veterinarians. Your dedicated support allowed us to provide these at no cost to our clients.



At the same time, the Main Stay team began working on a plan to resume services as soon as the shelter in place was lifted. We developed a comprehensive COVID-19 risk management plan for the therapeutic riding program which resumed in early July. In addition, the staff developed an innovative remote e-learning format which allowed groups from schools and local agencies to still participate in and experience the therapeutic benefits of the farm. This successful new program was launched in June and has been enthusiastically received. Virtual Animal Assisted Learning sessions can focus on social/emotional or academic goals, based on the needs of the group. Most importantly, it helps individuals increase their connection with the world which is desperately needed right now.



For clients who have been so isolated over the last 6 months, being able to return to the farm (either in-person or virtually) has breathed life back into individuals who have needed it the most—particularly those battling mental illness.

Each year we provide animal-assisted learning sessions to a group of teen girls through the Lake County Health Department. Since they weren't able to come to the farm in person this summer, we offered them the opportunity to participate in the sessions remotely. One teen girl who struggles with depression was part of this group. During the first Zoom session her only participation was a “thumbs up” emoji. It can be hard to judge the impact of the animals in a virtual setting, but we were grateful that she hadn't opted to leave the session.

By the second week she spoke up right away and interacted throughout the session, accurately identifying the animals' non-verbal communication and relating their feelings to her own experience. Even through the small video image we could feel her connection to the animals and witnessed a positive shift in her outlook. As the sessions drew to a close she said that she had two favorite days of the week, one when she got to “go” to Main Stay and the other when she spent time with a parent who had limited custody visits.



It's amazing that even though she had never been to Main Stay in person she was still impacted so deeply by her experience.

"This year has been especially difficult given the situation. That being said I would like to thank you for accommodating us during the current pandemic and allowing us to do virtual sessions. You have no idea how much it means not only to us at the Lake County Health Department but also those that we serve."

--Heather Hamlet, Counselor, Lake County Department of Health

And then there's the McHenry High School Bridges class that is able to safely meet at the farm once a week since they have plenty of room to social distance. The Bridges class is a special education program for students transitioning into adulthood. They are able to do their classroom work, interact with each other and participate in an animal-assisted learning session. For some it's the only place they have been allowed to go since March. Bridges student, Sam shares what being with our little herd means to him,



"Working with the littles makes me feel at peace and fills me with joy because most of the time I'm either stressed out or fighting a war inside me and working with the littles takes that stress away".

Many of our clients already live in a world that is limited by their ability to navigate or cope. Coming to Main Stay is the highlight of their week. ***Thanks to you***, they have a place they can go where they can be themselves, work on personal goals, interact with friends and animals who really SEE and accept them for who they are on any given day.

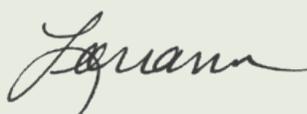
We have seen the need for our services grow because of increased social isolation created by the COVID-19 pandemic. **Through both virtual and in-person programming Main Stay has provided services to 262 clients during this challenging time.** The farm's beautiful land, exceptional staff, and kind animals offer a peaceful experience, both virtually and in-person, that combines nature, horses, and animals to achieve therapeutic benefits.

With the caring support of people like you, Main Stay had the resiliency to quickly adapt programming so that we were able to provide services when they are needed most. During a time when good news seems to be limited, you can celebrate in knowing that you have helped create a place where people can connect with others, animals and themselves and work on their own personal resiliency in order to better cope with the world around them.

If you're able, please consider making a gift to Main Stay today. Your ongoing support will allow us to continue to provide these essential services to the many folks who are depending on us right now. **Main Stay has a 4 Star Rating by Charity Navigator for our accountability, transparency and dedication to financial excellence.** At a time when so many agencies are in need, you can feel confident that your donation to Main Stay will be managed wisely.

Wishing you and those you hold close, good health, peace and joy during the holiday season--even as we navigate these uncertain times.

With Gratitude,



Loriann Dowell
Executive Director

P.S. We've made giving easier than ever! Simply use the camera on your phone to scan the QR code below and it will take you to our Facebook fundraiser page. And every dollar you give will go to Main Stay since Facebook doesn't charge any fees!



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