

The Toronto Funding Network Report
The Urban Youth Riding Project
Leadership and Horses

In the 2009 – 2010 school year, the Urban Youth Riding Project ran 5 Leadership and Horses programs. Thanks to the generous donation from TFN, we were able to offer this amazing program to 11 additional youth. We spread our donation throughout 4 programs. All the programs targeted youth living in Toronto's highest need neighborhoods. We worked with Aboriginal youth from Council Fire Native Cultural Centre, in Regent's Park, and with youth from the House of Ghesig in Scarborough's Muriel Dummont neighborhood. We were very excited to extend the reach of the program into the Jane-Finch neighborhood where we worked with a grade 8 class at Brookview Middle School.

The youth, in our programs, struggle with academic and social challenges and are considered "at risk" for the multiple social difficulties related to living in poverty. Many have been in conflict with the law and two of the programs included a community building initiative with the police. We partnered with officers from Divisions 51 and 31. Two programs ran one morning a week out of Windreach Farm, near Whitby. The other ran once a week out of The Royal Canadian Riding Academy in Newmarket. Twenty one youth successfully graduated from the Leadership and Horses I program.

We are pleased to report that all the programs were enormously successful. Attendance was excellent and we received extraordinary feedback from parent's, teachers and students. As we have come to expect, learning to ride and care for horses has had a positive impact on youths' self-esteem and confidence. It is very clear how the relationship with a horse can help kids access leadership strengths not typically seen in other settings. All the youth were surprised at the physical demands of riding and there was an obvious improvement in fitness levels. The programs offered a wonderful and rare opportunity for the youth and police to spend positive time together. Friendships developed and so did trust and respect. One of the officers in 31 Division is trying to raise funds to run a Leadership and Horses program for youth in a mentorship group he started in Jane-Finch.

The impact and the outcomes have been most impressive in the Brookview program. These kids are struggling with a number of difficulties. The teacher is impressed with how well the skills and attitudes learned with the horses align with the character building initiatives in the TDSB. She believes the horse program has helped students get along better and be more respectful in the classroom. She says they are calmer, happier and more focused in their schoolwork. She says she is very grateful to be involved in such a "fabulous" program.

Our programs aim to reduce conflict and foster closer ties in the community. Kids bond with other kids, with teachers, social service workers and with the police. We

also aim to raise cultural awareness and acceptance through the inclusion of relevant ceremonies and traditions. We are very excited this year because – for the first time – we introduced Native culture to kids from other cultures. Dancers, drummers and a storyteller attended a session with our Brookview students. It was extraordinary. Students and officers also attended a rehearsal of Tono, a horse themed dance, performed by the Aboriginal dance troop, Red Sky. This rehearsal was in preparation for performances at the Olympics. Several of the dancers and musicians are indigenous horse people from Mongolia. The performers were very excited about our project and have asked to visit our horses when they return from touring.

The kids spent a great deal of time video taping and photographing each other and the horses. We have created a Facebook Page and put together a short video. We are working on a video photo essay. The pictures tell the best story.

All in all, it was an exceptional year for the Urban Youth Riding Project. Our main challenges continue to stem from the fact that we do not have a secure location or horses of our own. Since our inception in 2006, we have had to move several times. With a goal of finding a home of our own, close to or in the city, our focus is now on fundraising. We have put programs on hold until the Fall of 2011. The idea of a city barn is not without precedent. The Canadian Association of Riding for the Disabled (CARD) managed to do this at J. Lord Ross Park in Downsview. We envision a community stable/farm with rescued horses and farm animals. Bringing kids and animals together creates an extraordinary space for healing and growth. We imagine a space where kids would feel comfortable coming on their own whenever they feel the need for a little comfort and support.

The donation from the Toronto Funding Network helped make a huge difference in the benefits and impact of our programs this past year. We were able to offer the Leadership and Horses program to 11 additional youth-at-risk, 4 from Council Fire Native Cultural Centre, in Regent's Park, and 4 from Brookview Middle School, in Jane Finch and 3 from the House of Ghesig in Scarborough's Muriel Dummont community. Your generous donation helped us to:

- Connect inner city youth with nature and horses
- Foster a sense of belonging and develop skills needed for positive group membership
- Improve relations between youth and the police
- Help kids develop leadership and strengthen character
- Reduce conflict in schools and neighborhoods
- Improve school performance and attendance
- Increase fitness and keep kids safe after school
- Keep kids out of gangs

What each youth takes with them from our programs is different. What they all share is pride, a sense of accomplishment and hope. This is an experience they will carry with them the rest of their lives.

Actual Budget

Leadership and Horses I

| | |
|---|------------|
| Brookview Middle School (8 youth)..... | \$9,338.77 |
| Council Fire Native Cultural Centre (8 youth)..... | \$7,320.96 |
| Native Child and Family Services House of Ghesig (5 youth)..... | \$7,642.98 |

THE TORONTO FUNDING NETWORK CONTRIBUTION

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|---|--------------------|
| Leadership and Horses I (11 Youth at \$973)..... | \$10,703.00 |
| 4 from Council Fire | |
| 4 from Brookview | |
| 3 from House of Ghesig | |
| Tides Administration Fee | \$1,059.12 |
| TOTAL | \$11,762.12 |

Some Testimonials.....

Stannette

I have learned how to control my anger around the horse, feeling comfortable around the horse and when you are around the horse you must pay attention to them because they can tell if you are worried or scared.

We learned how to take charge, which is an important role in life.

Shantel

For my class to get this opportunity made us so grateful, even though sometimes I had my moments I was still grateful and very happy.

Tysha

Being there has taught us that horses need to be loved just like humans.

Danny

The Urban Youth Riding Project is a wonderful project for kids at any age because you can learn lots of stuff like how to build you your confidence around horses and people. After our last section I have changed my behaviours around horses and people.

Arnelle

This project has taught me to give love to all living things and to treat people and animals the way I want to be treated. I loved every second of it! This has been one of the best experiences I had this year.

My horse Tempelton has changed me as a person because he has feelings and his feelings taught me that I can't always be negative around him or people because they will feel the same way.

I didn't realize that one horse can have such a huge IMPACT on someone's life.

I feel this program can help children that don't have a lot and live in a "bad" community because they will get a chance to see the world and notice that the world is not all about gangs and guns and that the world is filled with beautiful and loving things.