

The Impact of Wild Hearts

Speaking at our 10th Anniversary Gala on May 2, 2025, Andrew Stewart, EBD Special Education teacher at Ravenel Elementary School, shared the following:

“Each day in my classroom, I see how trauma, anxiety, and behavioral struggles can hold a child back—not just academically, but socially, emotionally, and personally. These are students who often feel misunderstood or overlooked in traditional settings.

That’s why Wild Hearts has meant so much to us.

Once a month, I’ve had the privilege of bringing my students here for equine therapy. For them, it’s not just about riding a horse—it’s about connection, healing, and hope. When they come here, they are met with patience, gentleness, and unconditional acceptance—from both the staff and the animals.

Tonight, I want to tell you the story of one student in particular.

When we first started coming to Wild Hearts, this student was incredibly closed off. He struggled with confidence and had extreme difficulty regulating his emotions. If he didn’t want to do something, he wouldn’t. His refusal behaviors could last over two hours—no talking, no eye contact, just a wall. He wouldn’t ask for help. He wouldn’t take risks. He had learned, somewhere along the way, that the world was too hard, and retreating felt safer than trying.

But then, something shifted.

The very first day he climbed onto a horse, something clicked. His eyes lit up. His body relaxed. It was like the horse saw through the walls he had built, and told him, “You’re safe here.” From that moment, he was hooked.

Since beginning equine therapy, we’ve seen noticeable, measurable growth. His refusals are no longer frequent or intense. The moments when he shuts down are fewer and far shorter. He talks more. He jokes more. He asks questions. He tries, even when things are hard. He’s more confident—not just with horses, but in math, in reading, and in relationships with his peers.

This child who used to avoid anything difficult now walks into challenges with his head up and shoulders back.

I’ve watched him transform—not because of a worksheet or a reward system, but because of a horse. Because of a place that offered him connection, trust, and a chance to feel capable.

This is the impact of Wild Hearts.”





Danielle Mathieu, a special education teacher at the Hamilton Career & Technology Center, describes how Wild Hearts' **All In for Student Connections** program impacts her students:

"Wild Hearts Equine Therapy has been an invaluable resource for our high school career center students seeking to develop essential life skills. Through their innovative program, our students have not only learned calming techniques but have also honed their teamwork, communication, and job skills in a unique and enriching environment. The equine therapy sessions provide a serene setting where students can connect with these magnificent animals, learning to understand and manage their own emotions in the process. The gentle presence of the horses serves as a powerful catalyst for self-reflection and growth, teaching our students the importance of patience, empathy, and trust.

Moreover, the structured activities designed by Wild Hearts Equine Therapy promote collaboration and effective communication among our students. Working together to navigate various challenges and tasks with the horses fosters a sense of camaraderie. It encourages the development of the strong interpersonal skills essential for success in any career path.

Perhaps most importantly, the experience gained through Wild Hearts Equine Therapy translates directly into valuable job skills. From practicing responsibility in caring for the horses to mastering the art of clear and concise communication, our students emerge from these sessions with newfound confidence and competence that will serve them well in their future endeavors.

We are immensely grateful for the partnership with Wild Hearts Equine Therapy and the positive impact it has had on our students' personal and professional growth. [Wild Hearts'] dedication to empowering young individuals through equine-assisted activities is commendable, and we wholeheartedly recommend their program to any educational institution seeking to enrich the lives of their students."

