

PONY POWER THERAPIES

ORGANIZATION OVERVIEW

FY 2024

MISSION & HISTORY

Pony Power connects people with disabilities or life challenges to the wonders of horses, farming and nature. Located on a fully accessible 13-acre farm in Mahwah, New Jersey, Pony Power is Bergen County's only facility that provides equine- (specifically horse-) assisted activities for people who need extra support.

The organization was founded in 2000 by Executive Director Dana Spett, a lifelong equestrian and Doctor of Social Work who discovered therapeutic horseback riding as an alternative treatment for one of her daughters. In 2005 Pony Power became a 501(c)3 non-profit organization.

Pony Power has been a PATH (Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship) International Member Center since 2000. PATH is the equine-assisted activity industry's leading accrediting body. All Pony Power instructors are certified by PATH or working toward their certification.

OUR PARTICIPANT COMMUNITY

Time spent with horses and in nature can benefit everyone. Our participant community is broad and includes people with physical, intellectual or developmental disabilities, as well as those experiencing learning differences, mental health diagnoses, trauma, loss, and life-limiting or life-threatening diseases. Through partnerships with local organizations, we also serve people facing food, housing or financial insecurity.

Pony Power welcomes approximately 200 participants to the farm each week, ranging in age from 1 to 96. We work with both individuals and groups, including schools, adult day programs, hospitals, community organizations, seniors in assisted living or specialized programs, and veterans.

Our community disproportionately faces physical and financial barriers to accessing equine- and nature-based experiences. We are a fully inclusive environment, dedicated to removing all barriers to participation.

We also recognize that there is a "service cliff" once a person with disabilities turns 21, and that our adult participants may have different needs or goals than our younger participants. Several of our programs are designed specifically for adults to connect with the farm. We also recently began to offer supported employment opportunities for adults with outside job coaches.

OUR HORSES & SMALL ANIMALS

Pony Power is home to 22 seasoned therapy horses and ponies. Most of our horses have been donated or rescued, and each has been screened to ensure quality of movement and temperament—essential for safely learning riding skills and more. Participants are paired with the horse or pony best suited to their needs and goals.

Pony Power is also home to pigs, goats, sheep, chickens and honey bees.

PROGRAMS

Pony Power's programs are centered around the remarkable benefits of time spent with horses and in nature. Some of the many benefits our participants experience include improved strength, balance, posture, flexibility, verbal and nonverbal communication, attention, motor planning, direction following and problem solving. Equally important for our participants are feelings of community, connection and joy—antidotes to isolation, loneliness, anxiety and depression.

EQUINE-ASSISTED PROGRAMS

Our equine-assisted programs are open to those who need more support or different programming options than what traditional equestrian centers offer.

Therapeutic horseback riding: our flagship program focuses on basic riding skills in a safe, structured and supportive environment. In addition to one-on-one instruction from a qualified therapeutic riding instructor, each Pony Power rider also has a volunteer lead walker and side walker for additional support and safety. A horse's movement is rhythmic, repetitive, responsive and mirrors the human gait. By maintaining an upright position on a horse's back, riders strengthen and develop muscles in their trunk, neck and legs. Riders are also provided proprioceptive, vestibular and sensory input, helping them to coordinate movements, integrate both sides of their body simultaneously and gain a greater sense of body awareness. Our participants also experience many emotional benefits from riding, such as feelings of self-confidence, independence and accomplishment.

Horse care and horse handling: our non-riding programs promote life skills such as safety, problem solving, responsibility and setting and respecting boundaries. Activities focus on care and handling, including grooming, lead-walking and tacking (saddling) horses.

NATURE-BASED PROGRAMS

As our participant community has grown, we have expanded our services beyond equine-assisted activities to offer nature-based programs that utilize the entire farm. All programs are rooted in social work theory and practice, and are designed to enhance participants' physical, mental and social wellbeing.

Garden-assisted learning: one-on-one sessions in our Farm in the Forest vegetable garden, centered around all aspects of gardening. Activities include harvesting produce, sensory scavenger hunts, plant care, art-making, and learning about plants, sustainable agriculture practices and composting.

All HANDS In: structured lessons for young adults with disabilities to practice life, occupational and personal-social skills. Learning experiences are centered around our horses, the farm and nature.

Forest Babies: child-led outdoor sessions for children ages 1.5-4 to explore their senses, feed and observe animals, walk and crawl on different terrains, taste in the garden, make music, listen to nature sounds and socialize. Sessions give both children and their caregivers a rare opportunity to disconnect from technology and simply be present in nature.

Summer programs for children and adults: half-day programs for specialized groups or local organizations. We also offer one-week programs for children with or without disabilities, mental health challenges, and life-threatening or life-limiting diseases and their siblings. Activities include supported horseback riding, horse care and handling, farming, nature crafts and observing our small animals.

Internship program: a paid internship program for teen boys interested in food production. Referred by Paterson's Oasis - A Haven for Women and Children, the teens spend the growing season learning about food production practices before putting their knowledge into action at Oasis' rooftop raised-bed garden.

Supported volunteering: a pilot program for participants who are interested in volunteering, but need extra support to accomplish the job. We offer coaching around two key volunteer roles: farm crew and garden crew.

THE FARM & PROPERTY

Pony Power's 13-acre farm is rooted in universal design and our fully-accessible campus allows us to welcome people of all physical abilities.

Our property comprises a main barn, outdoor and indoor riding arenas, a vegetable garden, a farmhouse, and a smaller barn that also serves as a classroom space. Three caretakers live in on-site residences.

The farm's original 4-acre footprint was nearly doubled in 2016 when Pony Power acquired its adjoining property. In 2017, an additional 6.5 acres to the north of the farmhouse—now home to the Farm in the Forest garden—were offered to Pony Power as a free lease in perpetuity. All three properties have been integrated and designed to be environmentally regenerative.

THE FARM IN THE FOREST GARDEN

Our Farm in the Forest vegetable garden began as a way for participant families to safely visit Pony Power during the COVID-19 pandemic. It proved to be such a natural and popular extension of our equine-assisted activities that we decided to expand its size and programming.

A major expansion of the garden was completed in March 2023. This fully accessible half-acre space is central to our nature-based programs and provides opportunities for our participants to engage with nature, build skills, and better understand food systems. A large greenhouse allows us to extend our growing season and offer additional workforce development programming for adults with developmental or intellectual disabilities.

We use regenerative farming practices to grow more than 80 crops—including vegetables, herbs and flowers—with an emphasis on improving the land, rather than depleting its resources. In 2022 we donated over 2,000 pounds of harvested produce to Paterson's Oasis - A Haven for Women and Children and the Center for Food Action in Mahwah. We expect to harvest and donate a similar amount during the current growing season, and significantly more as the garden matures.

The 1,000 pounds of manure generated by our horses every day are processed using the garden's O2 composting system. The finished compost is used throughout our property.

STAFF & VOLUNTEERS

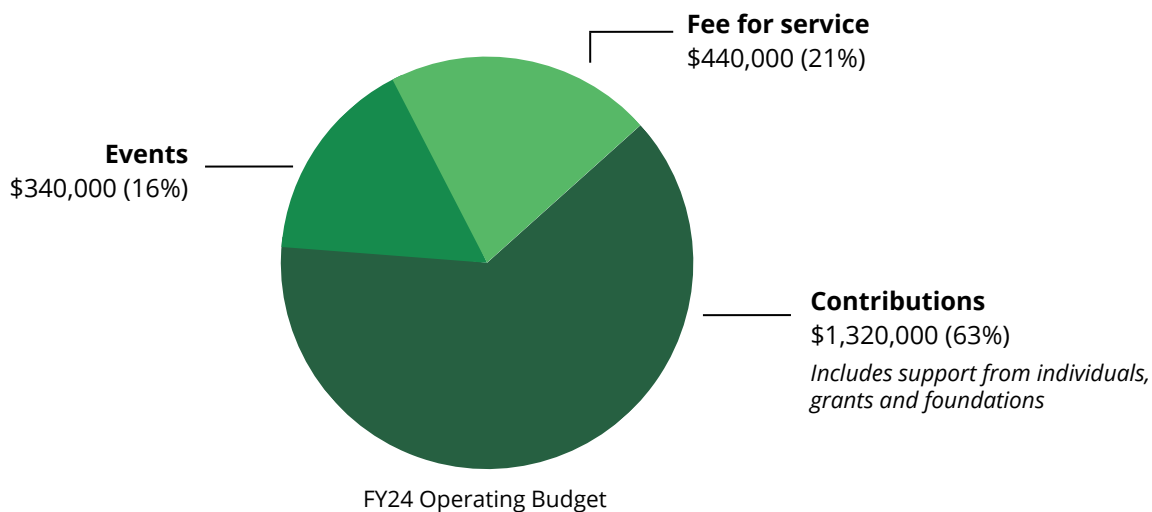
Pony Power employs 20 staff members dedicated to horse care and program services, and 4 staff members who manage operations, finance, development, marketing and communications.

Pony Power's riding instructors have dual areas of expertise: working with people with disabilities or life challenges in addition to strong horsemanship skills.

We train approximately 150 new volunteers each year and have a regular rotation of more than 80 volunteers each semester who assist in lessons and help care for the farm, small animals and garden. We also welcome approximately 50 corporate volunteers throughout the year. Volunteer support and training are overseen by a dedicated Volunteer Manager.

BUDGET, FUNDING & FINANCIAL AID

Pony Power's FY24 (July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2024) operating budget is \$2,100,000. Fundraising efforts are led by the Executive Director, with support from the Assistant Executive Director and involvement from the Board of Directors.



We have not raised the fees for our programs for over ten years, knowing that families who have a child or children with disabilities are more likely to have greater out-of-pocket medical and childcare expenses. We actively fundraise in order to keep our activities affordable and to offer financial aid to those who demonstrate need.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Pony Power's Board of Directors advises, governs, oversees policy, assists with the promotion of the organization and ensures fiduciary responsibility. Members are selected based on their understanding of and commitment to Pony Power's mission and their professional skill sets. We are grateful to have 100% annual giving by the Board. Three of our members are parents of current or past participants. One has been a recipient of services, and two joined us initially as volunteers.

Current members:

Susan Viniar, Chair
Steven Hirsh
Lindsey Inserra
Michael Jenkins
Shannon Lazare
Linda Rosato
Dana Spett, DSW (non-voting member)
Loretta Stadler
John Workman

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Pony Power has long-standing relationships with numerous local non-profits, hospitals and organizations, including Center for Food Action, Center for Hope and Safety, Columbia University Department of Pediatrics, Department of Developmental Disabilities, Family Promise, Hackensack Meridian Health's Joseph M. Sanzari Children's Hospital, Hackensack Meridian Health, Institute for Child Development, Oasis – a Haven for Women and Children, Perform Care-Bergen's Promise, The Valley Hospital, West Bergen Mental Healthcare, and Women Supporting Women. We also work with numerous local schools, including Bergen County Special Services, CTC Academy, Garfield Public Schools, Ramsey Public Schools, Ridgewood Schools, Wayne Public Schools and Wyckoff Public Schools.