

January 14, 2018

I am writing to share the impact that Brownie and Katie have had on my son's trajectory in life, and how he ties into the dreams I have for my son's future.

My 4 year old son Curren is one of 25 known worldwide cases of HIVEP2 disorder, an ultrarare neurological disorder characterized by profound developmental disabilities, medical complexities, and movement disorders. It is a synaptic disorder, which makes the communication from his brain to his body inefficient and often ineffective. My son specifically is nonverbal, non-ambulatory, suffers from seizures, has severe sensory processing disorder, intellectual disability, autism, ataxia, trouble swallowing, stunted growth, and static encephalopathy in his brain. He has been in intensive therapy since he was 9 months old, and for the past year, he has spent 14 hours a week in therapy and 26 hours a week in a special education preschool program. The rate at which he learns is very slow, but he does make progress, particularly if the circumstances are meaningful and personally motivating to him.

We started coming to Unbridled Strides in October 2017. During our first visit, I pushed Curren in his stroller through the pasture, and Brownie came directly to him. He allowed my son to stick his fingers in his nose and didn't back away. From that moment when they first connected, I believe this horse chose my son and my son chose this horse. We have come every week since that moment, and the rate at which Curren is learning has greatly accelerated. Brownie is teaching Curren about balance, strength, reciprocal movement, independence, and communication, and is providing a calming sensory experience that allows more learning to occur.

Curren cannot sit on a couch alone or in a chair unstrapped because he will fall. He sometime loses balance and falls over when sitting on the floor. But he has quickly learned how to sit on Brownie without losing balance and is now even trotting with him. He has learned to catch himself and put his arms down when he's off balance. We had tried for 3 years to get a protective reflex established with no success until now. He is now demonstrating a protective reflex at home, and will catch himself with his arms when falling. His core is getting stronger through riding, and he is starting to better understand reciprocal movement. He started crawling on hands and knees for the first time shortly after he began riding Brownie, because that movement has been reinforced through his lessons. In fact, his private physical therapists recently removed crawling as a goal because essentially no progress had been made in 3 years of effort. Brownie taught my son how to crawl in a matter of months.

Curren is also nonverbal with very minimal expressive communication skills. Brownie is teaching him to request to "go", through both pointing and vocalizing the word. Brownie is patient and waits for the right cue. Curren also requests to go "fast" through a small communication picture board he uses when riding, and he belly laughs every time that Brownie trots with him. Since my son cannot run, being able to go fast when he wants to and feel the change in gait and movement is liberating for him.

Because of Curren's extreme sensory processing disorder, he is rarely able to effectively organize and regulate his movements and thoughts. It is the biggest barrier for his ability to learn. We have tried every method recommended to calm this dysregulation, but nothing has been truly effective. My son is calmest and happiest when he is sitting on Brownie, and it hasn't been the same with any other horse. His smooth trot doesn't jar or bounce him too much, and getting that whole-body vestibular input achieves a sensory regulation that is more successful than any other method we've tried. Curren is

aware of his body when he's riding Brownie, and he is able to calm down and understand where he is in space and what he should be doing.

Brownie has also provided a unique bonding experience for both of my sons. My older son Weston is now riding with Curren. This is an activity that the boys really enjoy together. Brownie is part of their team, and pays close attention to make sure they are safe and balanced. This is one of the only "normal" activities they get to participate in together as a 4 year old and an 8 year old without wheelchairs, adult hand holding, etc.

My son has seen tremendous personal development while working with Brownie and Katie. Many of these outcomes could be achieved with other horses Katie works with, but it would not be the same. He has a personal bond that makes this work more meaningful and motivating, and that I why his learning has been so accelerated. He does not respond the same way with other horses, and I have seen him push other horses away when they approach him. I am more excited that ever about Curren's potential, and that is because of what Brownie has taught him in such a short amount of time. If it were possible, I would have Curren learn from Brownie every day.

Because of his complex challenges, my son is almost always a bystander to things in life. There is very little that he can participate in without complete 1:1 assistance from an adult. This is the first time I feel he has something that he can own and fully participate in. When he is riding Brownie, he is not a child with profound disabilities, he a boy who loves to ride the horse he chose.

Brownie and Katie mean so much to our family, and we see them as long-term team members. My son's trajectory is life has already changed from the impact this horse has made over the past 3 months. My hope is that Brownie is always able to be part of my son's life.

Sincerely,

Nerissa Ramsey

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