

Days End Farm offers NEW BEGINNINGS

How one nonprofit rescue organization is taking a proactive approach to combating horse neglect and abuse

By Emily Daily/Jump Media

When Kathy Schwartz-Howe and Allan Schwartz first rescued Toby, a malnourished buckskin gelding, in 1989 and brought him home to their small farm in Lisbon, Maryland, they had no idea how their actions would one day shape the lives of thousands of horses. Fast forward 31 years, and Days End Farm Horse Rescue has expanded into a thriving 501(c)3 nonprofit rescue and rehabilitation center, sheltering up to 150 horses annually. Thanks to the support of loyal donors, local volunteers, dedicated staff and skilled trainers, DEFHR has rescued, rehabilitated and successfully rehomed more than 2,600 horses.

Education Matters

A key aspect that sets Days End Farm Horse Rescue apart is how open they are to youth involvement. “Many dog and cat shelters and other horse rescues have age stipulations,” says Nicky Wetzelberger, DEFHR’s Community Outreach Director. “At our facility, starting at age 5, children can come and volunteer.

“We believe we can have the biggest impact in equine welfare by empowering youth

to be role models,” she adds. “I have parents come to me all the time telling me about the amount of confidence that their child is now showing after being a part of our programs. These kids are the next generation of animal owners. Our education is heavy in equine welfare, but we’re also teaching them to be compassionate to all living things.”

The facility is also a licensed Maryland Horse Discovery

Center, which includes about 40 other farms in the state. The program was created by the Maryland Horse Industry Board with the mission of helping the general public of all ages and experience levels learn about horses in a friendly environment. “We’re part of the original group that spearheaded the entire program,” says Wetzelberger. “We’re an entry-level, beginner-friendly facility. People can come to us who have no experience with horses and our aim is to inspire them and hope that they will have a different view on equine welfare.”

The farm was also instrumental in creating a curriculum called “Horses for Courses.” “It was written to Maryland public school middle

school standards, and it’s all about incorporating horses into science, social studies and environmental literature,” says Wetzelberger, who co-authored the curriculum. “This way school principals could more readily approve field trips to the farm and let the kids get hands-on experiences with the horses.”

The organization has strong relationships with local animal-control authorities and humane agencies, and it is through these agencies that horses in need of rescue come to DEFHR. The facility provides intervention services throughout Maryland and the surrounding states, including as far away as New York, Massachusetts, North Carolina and Florida. They also host an educational series to give investigators the skills they need to feel safe and confident when working on equine cases.

DEFHR is also one of the few horse rescues in the country capable of helping to mount large-animal rescue efforts, such as those needed after hurricanes. The facility offers hands-on programs to teach emergency responders how to safely respond to an equine situation.

Interns are vital members of the DEFHR team and participate in all aspects of the farm’s daily activities.



In addition to hosting these events at their facility, DEFHR travels to schools, universities, community organizations, conferences and industry expos to raise awareness and educate the public.

“We want to be a place of empowerment and inspiration through our education programs,” says Wetzelberger. “This is where we can have the greatest impact for horses. Whether it’s empowering animal control to be able to do their job, or empowering future horse owners to do right by their horse and know what responsible care is.”

Creating New Partnerships

At DEFHR, education doesn’t stop with the people, it also filters down to the horses as well. Their mission includes rehabbing, training and finding new homes for the rescued horses. The facility typically rehomes 50 to 60 horses each year. Though some of the horses are suitable only as companion animals, most can take part in under-saddle training. Once a horse has been rehabilitated and is deemed ready for work, the team creates a personalized program for each animal, building up their strength, overcoming behavioral issues and providing them the best education possible.

“Groundwork is always a large part of the horses’ training,” explains Leigha Schrader, the facility’s assistant trainer and a graduate of their internship program. “Our head trainer, Sara Strauss, and

Shaping the Leaders of Tomorrow

For more committed young adults, Days End Farm Horse Rescue offers an internship program designed to give participants insight into the operations of a horse rescue. Every year, about 25 interns are included in the program.

“Each one of them is so driven and the majority of them are women,” says Nicky Wetzelberger, DEFHR’s Community Outreach Director. “We’re helping to build the foundation that they need to be successful in the professional setting. The experience that they get at Days End is so important.

They’re vital to all the daily happenings, including all of the vet appointments and classes.” Many of the interns begin as volunteers at the facility, and those who graduate from the program often move on to careers in the equine field, such as large-animal veterinarians. “We’ve also had numerous interns go on to become veterinarians, rescue and volunteer coordinators or work in therapy programs and other equine-related jobs,” says Wetzelberger.



This content was provided by A Home for Every Horse, a resource for nonprofit horse rescues, sanctuaries and care facilities. Rescue organizations involved with A Home for Every Horse are eligible for many benefits from program sponsors. Learn more at AHomeForEveryHorse.com.

It is only thanks to our generous sponsors—Purina Horse Feed, Absorbine, Weatherbeeta and Tractor Supply Co.—that A Home For Every Horse is able to provide necessary resources to more than 600 horse rescues per year.



Nicky Wetzelberger, the facility’s Community Outreach Director, shares a quiet moment with one of the DEFHR horses.

I utilize in-hand and longe work to teach the horses how to better carry themselves before ever getting on. Each program is unique and tailored to the horses’ needs. It is amazing to witness the transformation that these horses achieve.”

Horses who are ready to be adopted by a new owner are added to the DEFHR website, which includes health and training information, as well as recent videos and photos. Many owners who adopt DEFHR horses become part of the facility’s “extended family,” keeping close ties with the organization and participating in its many activities throughout the year.

One such owner is Kim Ellis, who adopted her mare, Mika, in 2016 from DEFHR. “I think the rescued horses know they’ve been rescued,” says Kim, who often joins in demonstrations at the annual DEFHR Fall Festival with Mika. “I feel like most of these horses have a special place in their hearts where they bond because they know what it’s like to feel unsafe. I think they’re appreciative, and I think they realize how lucky they are.”

When responding to inquiries from the public, whether providing information about an educational event or a horse available for adoption, the DEFHR staff always includes the same phrase in their email signatures. It’s a simple but powerful message that expresses the organization’s past and continuing mission: “For the horses.”