

Bobby's Story

My son, Bobby, was diagnosed on the autism spectrum when he was three. He is almost 7 1/2 now. Since his diagnosis, he has been in Speech Therapy and Occupational Therapy in the Wayzata School District and through Children's Hospital.

In May of this year (2011), he hit a plateau in his therapies and things seemed to go downhill very fast. We entered Bobby and his brothers in our local soccer association thinking that would be a logical place to start with sports and help release some energy and all three boys would be together so it would be a "safe" activity for Bobby.

Let's just say it was a huge eye opening experience to what was really staring us in the face. Bobby was autistic and not likely to be able to play sports like "normal" kids. Although Bobby had the talent to play soccer, he didn't have the social capacity to play with all those kids or the ability to understand the game and all it entails.

After Bobby's first and last disastrous game, I finally turned to the Internet to find information about kids on the spectrum and sports. The first sentence was kids on the spectrum do not do well with team sports like soccer... Well, I didn't need to read that twice. As I continued reading, the site gave some advice on sports that kids on the spectrum generally accelerated at. I saw swimming, running, golf, **and horseback riding**. Horseback riding has been a part of my life since I was 5, but for personal reasons I had never wanted the boys to get into it.

After a week or two of praying and analyzing our options, I had a realization that riding horses has been a huge part of my life and horses have helped me through some very hard times and been involved in the majority of the wonderful times. I researched Equine Therapy in Minnesota and came up with a few places. **And there was just something about Freedom Farm that just spoke to me.** The next day, I spoke with Bobby's diagnosing doctor and we came to the conclusion that Equine Therapy might be a wonderful alternative therapy, and then I spoke to Susie at Freedom Farm and everything fell into place.



Before Bobby started riding at Freedom Farm he had a hard time with eye contact with anyone but me. He wasn't very affectionate. He didn't know his left from his right. He was very impulsive and didn't listen or follow through very well. He seemed generally unhappy and not very confident and certainly didn't "play" like other children. Since he started riding at Freedom Farm, he holds eye contact with almost everyone for a very reasonable amount of time. He's very affectionate to me and everyone in our family. He now knows his left from his right, follows directions much more thoroughly, he's less impulsive, he plays with his toys like I've never seen before, like a typical kid plays, and he is confident and seems genuinely happy. He still has some issues, but most, if not all, have improved. He is finally able to "let things go" much sooner than before and forgive much easier. But it is the "happiness" that means the most.

I know this is because of riding and I know that without Freedom Farm we would never have reached some of these very natural milestones. I'm so excited to see what happens this school year and hope to return to Freedom Farm again in the spring. It has been so helpful for Bobby in such a little period of time. We've now enrolled his twin brother, Danny, who is also on the spectrum.

Bobby's mom