



Annika's Story

"Hi, I am 11 years old and I have Cerebral Palsy, epilepsy, and I am profoundly deaf but wear Cochlear Implants. I love to go riding at Freedom Farm and even though it is "work" I have lots of fun."

-By Annika

Annika throwing the ball for the first chukker at Freedom Farm's annual Polo Event Fundraiser in 2013.

Annika's Mom shares...

I can't even begin to tell you how much Freedom Farm has made a difference for my child. Annika started riding when she was around 2 ½ years old. She had to take 3 years off because of scheduling conflicts but every year she asked to go back. She knows that after her birthday, which is in February, we need to start the countdown until riding starts again. The love and support that Annika receives from Susie and her great volunteers is more than words can ever express.

When Annika first started riding she only had a handful of words she could say. Just getting her to say 'walk on' and 'whoa' was something we had to work on. I remember having to just sit and wait for her to say 'walk on' (and believe me it wasn't just a few seconds) before she could start walking. Today she is one of the first ones to 'walk on' when given the chance. There are lots of times that she is so busy *talking* with her volunteers that she forgets to listen to the instructions.

That brings up how much progress she has made in the 6 years she has been riding. Processing has always been a struggle for Annika. Following more than 2 simple step directions at one time used to be a dream, but she could do this in her riding sessions before we saw it anywhere else. Today, we still have issues with her being able to tell you what she did in the previous class period at school, but her school para's will hear all about her riding session from the night before. We had the opportunity to bring her previous para and special education teacher to the farm this summer and they told me over and over - it was exactly how they imagined from how Annika had described it. This, from a child who struggles to write two descriptive words in a sentence.

With Annika's type of cerebral palsy she has 'high tone', meaning her muscles are very tight, so balance and core strength can be very difficult for her. It's easier to use the tightness versus strengthening her core muscles and using that to sit and balance, **but being on the horse has made this something 'fun' to work on.** My 'slumpy lumpy' child (as Susie calls it) now can sit up straight in the saddle with her hands up high *most of the time.*

Beyond all of this, I have to say that Freedom Farm has given Annika *freedom.* She loves to 'trot-on'; she loves how she feels *free* while on her horse. Annika is a daredevil. Her love for things faster and having no fear at times has her mother a little worried, but watching her on a horse is something I could do all day long. **Her smile lights up the room when she accomplishes something she has worked so hard on, and when she just gets to feel 'normal' on her horse. No more limits with her walking, not slower than everyone, just FREE.**

Thank you Freedom Farm for all that you have given my child and all the other great kids in this program.

