



ANNUAL REPORT

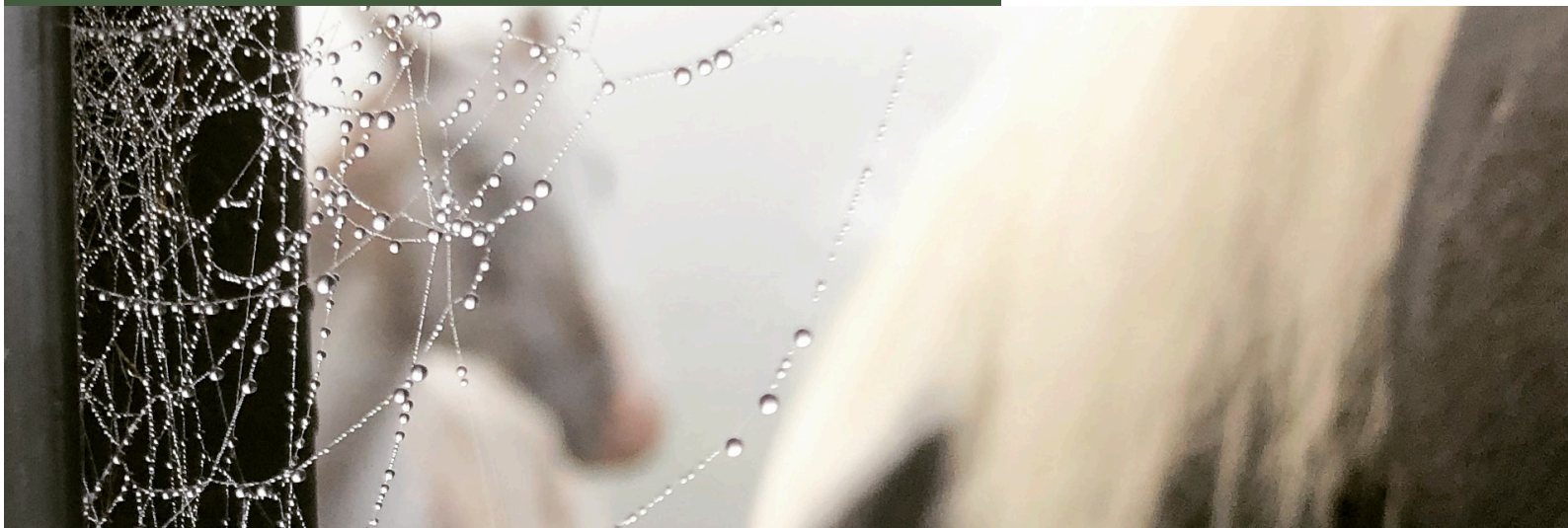
2024

We Can Ride connects humans and horses to transform the lives of people with disabilities and meet the evolving needs of the greater community.



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Letter from the Executive Director



Nita Hughes
Executive Director

6000+ Families Served

42 Years of Service

Dear Friends and Supporters of We Can Ride,

As we reflect on 2024, we are filled with gratitude for the meaningful progress we've made in providing life-changing experiences for the unique individuals we serve. Thanks to the generous support of our many donors, our annual gala, the Hay Day for Horses campaign, and the inaugural year of the 5K Derby Dash all met and surpassed their budgeted goals.

Celebrating 42 years of service, We Can Ride has remained a place where every client, regardless of their challenge, can experience growth and joy. Every day, we witness the pure transformation that takes place when our riders connect with our horses. The bond between human and horse is powerful and healing, offering not just physical benefits but profound emotional growth as well. Seeing the smiles on our riders' faces as they engage with their horses is a constant reminder of the incredible impact we have when we work together.

While we experienced the loss of our beloved Jasper, the oldest member of our herd, we remained steadfast in our mission to connect with and serve our riders. Jasper's legacy lives on in the deep connections we share with our animals and the lives we continue to touch.

Looking ahead, we are excited about the future and the growth of We Can Ride. Thank you for your unwavering support as we work to make a lasting difference in the lives of those we serve.

With gratitude,
Nita Hughes, Executive Director
We Can Ride

Programs and Services



Core Services

- Hippotherapy: occupational, speech, and physical therapy utilizing horses and riding
- Therapeutic Riding
- Equine Assisted Learning



Special Programs

- Herd Dynamics
- Equine Connections
- Volunteer Lessons
- Community Lessons
- Patti's Pony Connection for seniors living with memory loss/dementia
- School/Field Trips

Get more information
about our programs ➤

Program Spotlight: Hippotherapy

Hippotherapy supports clients' goals through a multi-disciplinary approach



In 2024, We Can Ride contracted with:

2

Occupational
Therapists

2

Physical Therapists

2

Speech
Therapists

...all working together to help our clients learn and grow alongside their equine friend.



Our Clients

By making equine activities accessible, we support our clients in their pursuit of living full and rich lives. Whether in the saddle or with horses on the ground, the diversity of experiences we offer is matched only by the diversity of the people we serve.

Therapeutic Riding

**81 clients
served**

Hippotherapy

**11 clients
served**

Equine Assisted Learning

**17 clients
served**

Herd Dynamics

**48
clients
served**

Volunteer and Community Lessons

**14 clients
served**

Unique Participants in 2024

**171
clients
served**



Our Volunteers



457
Active
Volunteers



23,000+
Volunteer hours
in 2024



150+
Average volunteers
each week

70

New volunteers
in 2024

6

Community
outreach
events

150+

Hours spent
training
volunteers



**Become a
volunteer**



Volunteer trainings include sidewalker, leader, and barn aid training as well as feeder and maintenance volunteer training



Volunteer Spotlight



Glen Stone

Sidewalker

“Working with clients here at We Can Ride is wonderful. It’s hard to put into words, but what is most significant is to see a client learn and progress, gain confidence. I see their physical bodies improve. I see their mental state go to another level, while the relationship with that special horse grows. Our relationship grows. It’s a beautiful experience.”



Julie Vangsness

Barn Aide, Volunteer Feeder

“My favorite thing about We Can Ride is the horses and mule. I have always loved horses, but have never had one. We Can Ride gives me a way to leave the city and, for a few hours, go back to my small-town roots with the horses being the prize. I continue to be in awe of how in tune to the riders these majestic animals are.”

Our Herd

It's the life cycle
of the therapy horse!

Evaluation

Trial

Service

Retirement

Our current herd includes 16 equines, 15 horses and one mule! Of these, five are mares and 11 are geldings.

Did you know?

Horses come to serve in our programs in a variety of ways:

- Horses can be donated to us. We are a 501c3 and the value of your donation is tax-deductible.
- Horses can be leased to us as a “free lease”. In this case, you retain ownership while your horse is with us. All cares are paid for by We Can Ride.

We take great pride in the standard of care our equines receive, including:

- Veterinary care, both routine and emergency through our partnership with the University of Minnesota
- Appropriate nutrition, supplementation and medication, continuously reviewed
- Tack fitting 4x annually
- Regular conditioning outside of class and monitoring “stress scores” to adjust workload as needed
- Heated stalls if needed, daily turnout, well-maintained summer pasture



Herd Spotlight

McDreamy's Story

Former thoroughbred race horse McDreamy came to We Can Ride in 2018. Having won over \$50,000 in purses on the track, he was a winner from the start. Still, he seems to have found his true calling as a therapy horse. His goofy personality and curious nature has endeared him to all who cross his path. Education Manager Michelle Haury calls him the most optimistic horse she's ever worked with.



In December of 2024, in a freak accident, McDreamy hit his head on a wood beam in his paddock shelter and fractured his orbital bone.

Equine Operations Manager Tabea Brockman wrote, "We made the trip to the University of Minnesota for a CT scan to see the full extent of the damage. I can't even begin to explain how grateful I am to have such an incredible facility so close to us. The technology they have is amazing, and the team there truly cares."

Unfortunately, the scan confirmed our worst fears. The damage was too severe, and the best option for Dreamy's comfort and long term well-being was to remove his eye.

The amazing thing about animals though, is how resilient they are. They don't dwell on what's missing, they just adapt and move forward. It's us humans who often struggle to let go and look past what we see as a 'disability'. Dreamy doesn't see himself as any less whole and I know he'll thrive, as he is a pro at his job."

McDreamy's recovery is going very well! He is adapting fabulously and seems curious about his limited field of vision. From the day he arrived back at the barn he had a community tending to his wound, alleviating his boredom and scratching his itches during his stall rest, giving him extra long massage and bodywork sessions, and supporting him in every way possible.

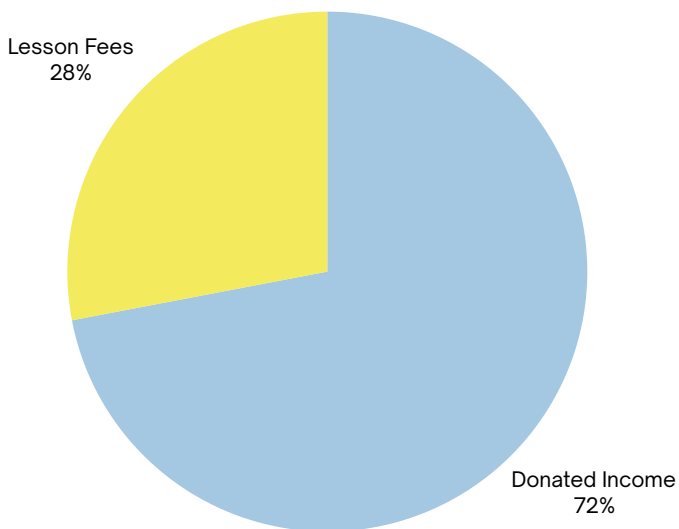
He began his reign as 2025 Horse of the Year as he has always been...goofy, optimistic, adaptable, loved, and whole.

Your Investment Transforms Lives

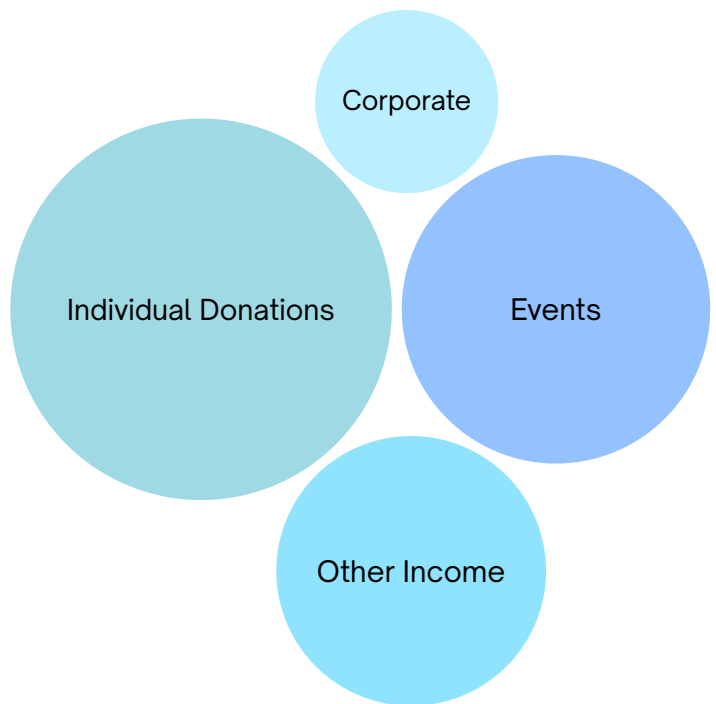


2024 Annual operating expenses: \$899,357

2024 Annual income: \$839,655



Only 28% of our annual income comes from lesson fees.



Individual donations make up the largest category of donated income.

Our Staff and Board of Directors

Our Staff

Nita Hughes, Executive Director
Tabea Brockman, Equine Operations Manager
Michelle Haury, Education Manager
Angel Maltby, Volunteer Coordinator
Rachael Jacques, Fund Development Manager
Laura Schmieg, Communications Manager

Certified Therapeutic Riding Instructors (CTRI's): Kristy Abbott, Heather Bomberger, Liz Firehammer, Natalie Cerchio, Abbi Flannery, Wanda Sayuk, Emma Heimlich, Liz Zelles

Barn Assistants: Jodi Ertmer, Leah Maurer, Carolyn Lyons, Hannah Johnson



Board of Directors

Laurie Chamberlain Burgess, Board Chair
Joe Timmons, Vice Chair
Erin Dunn, Treasurer
Andrea Wehrung, Secretary
Kelly Dietrich, Board Member
Heidi Armbrust, Board Member
Gregg Peterson, Board Member

Board Emeritus Members:

Dan Fisk
Janey Kiryluik
Cary Zahrbock

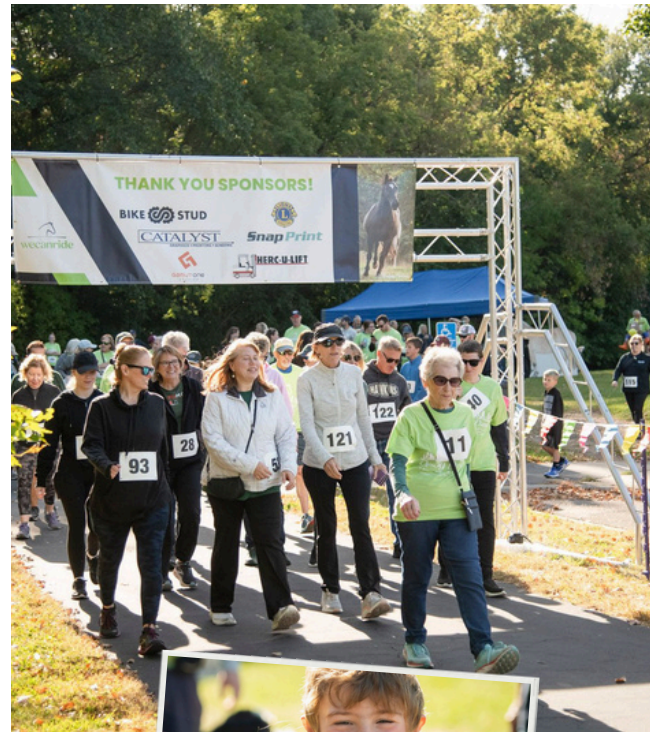


2024 Events

We host a variety of events throughout the year to fundraise, build community, and spread awareness

2024 Events included:

- An evening of music and dancing with Morpheus
- Horses, Heroes and Hope Gala
- Spring Open House, Programming Sampler, and Tack Sale
- Partnerships with Tanbark Horse Show and Harvest Horse Show
- Picnics with the Ponies
- Derby Dash 5k
- Trick or Trot



Strong and Sustainable

**Individual
Donors**

**Grant
Writing**

**Partnership
Cultivation**

We are deeply grateful for the incredible support of our community! The work we do at We Can Ride is powered not just by your generous financial contributions, but by your unwavering dedication and passion for our mission. This year, our team is working diligently to streamline our processes, ensuring that every gift is acknowledged and appreciated in the way it truly deserves.

As we move into 2025, we're excited to continue expressing our gratitude through special events and recognition opportunities that will celebrate our amazing donors. Your support means the world to us!

The team at We Can Ride is dedicated to the ambitious goal of submitting 100 to 150 funding applications in 2025. Our grant writing efforts will focus on securing diverse sources of financial support, including grants from local, state, and national foundations, to cover both programming and operational expenses. With these funds, we aim to expand our mission by increasing scholarship opportunities and supporting the development of new programs, such as *Patti's Pony Connection*, which serves targeted populations in need.

Strong partnerships ensure that we have the resources, expertise, and community backing necessary to create lasting impact. In 2025, our hope is to engage businesses and organizations throughout the Twin Cities not only to increase financial support, but also to expand our reach, access new opportunities, and gain credibility within the community.

Future Outlook

In 2024, impactful storytelling became the cornerstone of We Can Ride's development efforts. By sharing the transformative experiences that are created between staff, clients and our herd, we were able to highlight the strong sense of community cultivated at the barn. This approach has allowed us to lead with mission and create meaningful connections with our donors and partners.

Our Success

The success of our fourth quarter fundraising campaigns was made possible by the incredible generosity of hundreds of individual donors. Thanks to your support, our key campaigns achieved outstanding results, raising over \$100,000:

- **Hayday for Horses: \$42,700**
- **Derby Dash: \$15,472**
- **End of Year Appeal: \$53,463**

We are deeply grateful for every contribution that helped make this possible. Each donation plays a critical role in sustaining our mission, and we couldn't have reached this milestone without our amazing community of supporters.



Looking ahead, we're excited about the new funding partnerships and renewed collaborations we've established in 2024, including with Groves Foundation, Garda Capital, ECMC, the Midco Foundation, Minnesota Horse Council, Herc-U-Lift, and Dover Saddlery. These partnerships will continue to strengthen our work and drive even greater impact.



Contact Us



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wecanrideinc

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