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Project LPIE

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Xenophon Therapeutic Riding Center

Kiwi, Ozzie, Go-Go, Ivy, Rutherun, and George, are all the therapy horses at Xenophon Therapeutic Riding Center where I volunteer, typically, weekly. Xenophon is located in Orinda, California. At Xenophon, we use “the multidimensional movement of the horse to positively affect physical, psychological, and behavioral functioning” of the students. Currently, there are about one hundred and fifty volunteers and eight paid staff members all working together to provide horse therapy for kids. Xenophon currently offers five different services: Therapeutic Riding, Connected horse, Veterans Program, Hippotherapy, and Bridle Path To Success. Connected Horse is for adults suffering from early-stage dementia and Alzheimer's and their caregivers/partners. The Veterans Program is for veterans with PTSD (post traumatic stress disorder.) Hippotherapy is for kids (2-18 years old) that need help improving balance, coordination, and strength. Bridle Path To Success is for young adults that have disabilities, they work on taking care of the horse, and gaining confidence by interacting with the horses. I currently volunteer for the Therapeutic Riding program at Xenophon giving kids with mental and physical disabilities a chance to ride and connect with horses.

During therapeutic riding, there are different levels/ jobs we volunteers do. The base is sidewalking and like every volunteer I started out as a sidewalker. Being a sidewalker means that two volunteers are walking alongside the student and the horse. We are providing support and helping the student stay balanced. Once the student gets on the horse, we do an ankle and thigh

hold of the student. This is when we put our arm over the student's thigh and have control of the student's ankle. The amount of support varies depending on the student. There are some riders at Xenophon that can ride independently and don't need sidewalkers. As soon as I completed 50+ hours volunteering as a side walker, the staff thought I was capable and ready to be a groomer. A groomer is a volunteer that grooms the horses and gets them ready for their lessons. A groomer has to put the different tack on the horses. Another thing I do regularly is feed the horses in the morning. Occasionally, my dad and I will wake up at 6:00 am, slip on our jeans and our boots and drive the 20 minutes to Xenophon to feed the horses and clean their stalls. We usually finish up at about 7:30 am to get back in the car and be home before the rest of our family wakes up!

Ever since I was about four or five, I've loved being around and riding horses even if that meant cleaning stalls! In elementary school, at Springhill, I loved working with disabled kids: I would try to help out as much as I could whether it was eating lunch with the kids, reading to them, and or playing with them. I even got special recognition for being a special needs helper. So Xenophon allows me to combine both interests! A family friend of ours has a son named Patrick Kirbach who has autism. When Patrick was younger he used to ride at Xenophon. His mom Rosemary knew how much I loved horses and how I loved working with disabled kids so she told my mom about Xenophon. Once my mom told me about it I knew that I wanted to volunteer. After some persistence, I was accepted! My dad got accepted too, so now we volunteer together!

Parents of Xenophon kids are amazed at what their kids are able to do. They take pleasure in seeing their kids develop muscle tone, agility and confidence. Xenophon is a place

these kids can feel accepted and accomplished. Xenophon kids light up when they see their horses. Their lessons bring smiles to their faces and it is so heartwarming to see!

No matter how bad of a day I'm having, I can go to Xenophon and realize that there are kids that aren't as lucky as me. I can look around and see that there are volunteers, like me, who want to help those that are less physically or mentally capable. This fills me with pride and gives me hope and a happy feeling. Everyone at Xenophon is amazing and when I go to Xenophon I feel like I can be my total self and no one will judge me. If anything I feel respected and appreciated. Xenophon is like a second family. I look forward to volunteering and being challenged with new responsibilities in future years.