

ODS member and volunteer Glenda Childress is a co-founder and the Executive Director of PBJ Connections, a non-profit organization that provides mental health therapy using horses, to area at-risk youth and their families. "Horse lovers know the mental health benefits they get from being around horses", Childress said, "At PBJ Connections, we capitalize on the power of horses to make a real difference in the lives of the children with whom we work".

The youths that PBJ Connections serve come primarily from a low socioeconomic background and are struggling with mental health issues or are exhibiting behaviors that are preventing them from succeeding at school or in the community. PBJ Connections uses mostly non-riding activities with horses to help youths understand and control behaviors, improve self-esteem, gain insight into their issues, communicate more effectively, and build healthier relationships with their family and peers. All sessions are facilitated by a licensed mental health professional and a certified equine specialist.

Operating out of PBJ Dressage in Pataskala and Otterbein Equine Center in Westerville, PBJ Connections has over 20 horses and donkeys that work in their program. One of the unique aspects of PBJ Connections is their use of horses that have other careers. For example, two of the therapy horses in the program are FEI level dressage horses that seem to enjoy the shift in focus they get when they work with the children. Childress says, "It is a special treat to do therapy with these highly trained and engaged horses as they bring such personality to the sessions".

Some interesting facts about PBJ Connections are;

- In 2009, PBJ Connections delivered 522 client sessions to area youth and families.
- The Diagnosis and Situational Problems Breakdown for these youths (some clients fit in more than one diagnosis):
 - 32% ADHD
 - 21% Children with an absent parent
 - 16% Mood Disorders (including Bipolar and Depression)
 - 14% Asperger's syndrome
 - 14% Children with Divorced Parents
 - 14% Victims of suspected abuse
 - 11% Oppositional Defiant Disorder
 - 11% Pervasive Developmental Disorder
 - 10% Adopted children
 - 9% Adjustment Disorders (often caused by divorce, death, change of location)
 - 5% Children of Deceased parents
- 89% of sessions required funding assistance. This assistance is dependent upon private donations, grants, fundraising event, etc.

PBJ Connections gratefully accepts donations of any size. They are committed to providing mental health therapy to any child who needs it regardless of their financial situation. It costs \$600 to put one youth through 10 weeks of group sessions. To make a donation or to learn more about the program, visit their website at www.pbjconnections.org.

Photo is of Glenda's Grand Prix Schoolmaster "September" during a recent session demonstration.

