

The Prudence of Investing in Prevention, A Day of Grace.

Tuesday March 18th Youth VOICES 2014,

Unbound Grace ~ Sentinel Farms: Health Focused Youth Programming

Preventing Heroin & Opiate Experimentation Prevents the Lifelong Costs of Addiction

Heidi Burbo, Richmond

Hi my name is Heidi. Unfortunately I can't make it today in person because I'm a single mother and had to work. I came to know Sentinel Farms when my husband passed away in 2011. Both my daughter and I were having a tough time coping with his death. I needed some place for my daughter to get some joy back in her life. Autumn has always loved horses and animals. We came to meet Kerry at her farm. Autumn took to Kerry right away. Working at Sentinel Farms and going to camp gave Autumn purpose, and helped her to meet and open up to other kids her age. Autumn is an only child. The farm helped her fulfill some of her dreams. I feared Autumn would be lost in the school system and look to drugs or negative influences because of her loss. The farm helped her by influencing her in productive ways by giving her supportive structure and giving her a purpose, working with animals. She loves working with the horses, learning to ride, and to clean and take care of tack, as well as working with all the other animals (cows, chicken, etc). They also go on nature walks, take part in creative writing and journaling and learning about animals, tracking and focusing on her surroundings.

Having a place like Sentinel Farms has provided Autumn a safe and supportive community to grow up keeping her life happy and fulfilled. There's no room for the negative influences of drugs that I had worried about.

Autumn Burbo, Richmond

Hi my name is Autumn. I came to Unbound Grace when I was 11. After my father died my counselor told me about a place that had horses. My favorite animal is a horse. Before my dad died I use to go to him with my worries because I got picked on a lot at school. After my father passed, I lost hope. I wanted to be the one that had died because my dad was the only best friend I had at the time. The worst thing was that I thought I was the one who killed him. I thought I killed him because he had been ill for a long time and could not be around anyone who was sick and I had been sick right before he died. After he passed I went up to my mom and asked, "Did I kill dad because I was around him when I was sick?" My mom told me, "No, your father was very ill for a long time." When I returned to school, everyone was sorry but it didn't last long because

two week after, they began to pick on me again by saying, "At least I have a father and you don't." Soon after that I gave up.

When my mom said I was going a horse camp I got a little excited but then nervous because I didn't want anyone else picking on me. When I got there and met everyone, I noticed we were all the same because everyone adored horses. While working at Unbound Grace I got my hope back. If I didn't come to Unbound Grace and Sentinel Farms, I may have never gotten my hope back.

I think Unbound Grace can help people to not give up on their dreams even when some thing or someone gets in their way or if they lose their back bone like I did. I think my dad would have approved of Sentinel Farms because I never will give up on my dreams after being with Unbound Grace ~ Sentinel Farms and neither should other kids with the same problem as me.

Destiny Emmons, Huntington

Hello my name is Destiny Emmons. I am fourteen and have been going to Unbound Grace ~ Sentinel Farms Arts, Agriculture and Equestrian Camp for two years. I started going to the farm in the summer of my seventh grade year in middle school. I am now in 9th grade at Mount Mansfield Union High School. I was introduced to Unbound Grace and the farm by my friend Autumn. At the camp we do a variety of activities like horseback riding and taking care of the cows and everybody has fun while doing it. That is one of the many reasons why kids like me continue to go to this camp every year.

As winter approaches we want to be able to continue to spend time at the farm and be riding the horses but when it is dark and cold we can't do half of the things we do in the summer. If we could spend more time there it would occupy our free time because horses are like a vaccine that insures that kids like us don't turn to drugs to try and do something to take up our free time.

After becoming part of Unbound Grace and spending time at the farm I began to realize my true potential as a student and now have the goal of becoming a nurse when I grow up. I used to get bad grades when I was in Middle School and now I am on the honor roll in High School.

Madison Shepard, Bristol

Hi, my name is Madison Shepard and I am almost 11 years old. I have been riding at Unbound Grace, Sentinel Farms, for about 3 years. It is one of my favorite places to be, not only because of the horses but because of the incredible friends I have made.

Unbound Grace is more than just a horse barn. It is an amazing place that kids (and adults) can go to find a safe, drug and alcohol free environment, get exercise, learn new things and meet new people.

Kerry, who runs Unbound Grace, really cares about the kids, and everyone who is part of her community. She always succeeds in teaching everyone who comes to her barn how to be committed and loving in everything they do. One of the best things about Kerry Kurt is that she takes everything one step at a time, and always has fun doing it.

But working in a barn isn't always fun and games. You always need to keep your horse, and its stall clean. Shoveling manure is not the most fun aspect of having a horse:). Your horse always needs to have fresh hay and water, you have to clean the saddles and bridles, and keep the barn clean. When you are working around an animal that is 10 times your size, and has it's own mind and thoughts, you need to learn safety and control. These are all things that Kerry strives to teach the kids at the barn.

Horses are (in my opinion), some of the best things in the world. They are amazing, beautiful and teach me how to be patient and kind. Riding is exercise, but it is one of the most fun things I do.

I think an indoor arena that is accessible to the handicapped is extremely important. It would give people who need a way to exercise and socialize with people who they can relate to a place to feel whole. Sometimes it is easier to bond with an animal than it is to bond with a human. An indoor arena would also provide a place for riders to continue working with horses year-round.

Lots of kids work better in an outdoor environment than a classroom. Unbound Grace would provide that outdoor learning experience for kids with those needs. Kerry is so compassionate with the kids. She expects them to work hard and learn, and that makes them want to make her proud.

I think Unbound Grace is a place that makes kids believe in themselves. It keeps us involved in activities that are healthy for both our body and mind, and when you are working and playing with horses you don't have time to get involved with drugs and alcohol.

I hope that you will consider helping us to fund Unbound Grace. It is a place where kids can be kids, and will always be accepted for who they are.

A woman I know who has worked with horses her entire life once told me: "A horse's outside is good for a child's insides."

Thank you for listening:).

Dakota Demore, Starksboro

Hi my name is Dakota. I am fourteen and I attend Mt Abraham Union High School.

I started coming to the barn three years ago with my sister, now I come with a friend.

I think that kids need to have a place where they can go and learn about animals and ask any questions that they have, if they need too, and not be scared to ask it.

A place were boys can learn to do manly stuff. For example, fixing something that is broken.

Kids need a place where they won't get sucked into bad stuff like drugs or alcohol or cigarettes

I hope more people come to the barn and that we can open up the indoor riding arena for winter or at night.

I think in a kid's life there needs to be three things to keep them happy:

- 1. fun/free time, 2. time outside and 3. time with animals. It could be time with pets or barn animals it doesn't matter. At the Sentinel Farms there's all three together.*
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Emily Lowell, Huntington

I have been volunteering at Sentinel Farms for a year now. I found out about the farm from a friend who had said that the summer camp was really fun. I started volunteering at the farm around May and ever since I've never wanted to leave. Between the horses and the people I always feel as if it is a safe place and you don't have to worry about being judged by other people. The people around are always easy to open up to, many times I have caught myself telling someone something personal and for me that's big because I'm not the kind of person who can just throw out there feelings like beads on Mardi Gras, even after I catch myself, I keep going because I know I can trust that person and my information will stay where I told them.

When horse camp is going on, I am there at 7am which is an hour ahead of everyone else and I leave at 4pm or later which is 2 hours after everyone else has left. So, in the morning I feed the horses in the barn and sweep. I even get every stall prept with the horses halter and a lead line.

Being at the barn has taught me confidence. When leading the horses you learn that you need to take control or the horse will take control over you - which could be dangerous. Recognizing this made me think and question if other people in my life might be trying to lead me around. So, I started to take charge of my life and I feel a lot better about knowing that if something is unfair or I'm getting pushed around, I can stand my ground - when before spending time at the farm, I probably would have just pushed it off and kept going along like everything was okay.

I'm always busy with the farm or with Kerry's new ideas that she needs my help with. So, I'm not bored and able to discover the drugs and alcohol that most young teenagers my age can get access to real easily. So instead of drugs being on my mind I can focus on school work and working hard on the farm after school. I hope I will always be involved with Unbound Grace.

Morgan Cote – Lincoln

My name is Morgan Cote. As a young teenager I was very shy and didn't talk much. It was very hard for me to talk to my family and open up to them. I started working at Sentinel Farms when I was 15. I loved working with the horses and cattle. I also worked in the on-campus general store. I wasn't very thrilled by working in the store because I was so shy but it really helped me slowly come out of my shell by talking to strangers as they came in. Also by working with the horses and sharing a connection with them made me start to open up to Kerry without really realizing it. My goal is to help kids and young adults have the same opportunities as I had by having a safe place to learn and work with animals and learn many skills by working on an active farm. I graduated from Mt. Abraham Union High School and The Hannaford Career Center's Agribusiness Program in 2012.

I now work at Homeward Bound, Addison County Humane Society. I have been there for almost 2 years. I don't think I would be where I am today if it wasn't for Kerry Kurt and Unbound Grace.

Robin Dion, Starksboro

My name is Robin Dion. I am a wife, mother, grandmother and educator. I live in Bristol VT. This past August my daughter Emily approached me with the desire to start riding horses again.

On a hot, humid, rainy August day we decided to visit Sentinel Farms in Starksboro, VT. This is where our relationship with Kerry Kurt and Unbound Grace began.

As we sat on the porch, watching the chicken and roosters scurrying about, we noticed in the distance a group of children, some on horses others on foot, walking down the path with a few adults. All the children looked happy, organized and safe. As they approached the barn they all seemed to know what their jobs were, even the very young, and safety seemed to be of the utmost importance. What was very impressive to me was the relationship Kerry had with these children. Respect was very evident, on both sides.

After settling the children into their home cooked lunch, Kerry was most gracious to my daughter and me, and was eager to share Sentinel Farms and Unbound Grace with

us. Her passion and vision for this organization was contagious. From that day to the present, we have been honored to be part of Sentinel Farms and the Unbound Grace adventure.

As a current educator in the community in which I reside, I value public education, however I recognize the needs for alternative means of reaching out to our youth today.

Unbound Grace provides acres upon acres of beautiful Vermont farm land stretched out over rolling hills. There are stalls filled with beautiful horses that need care and loving attention, where respectful relationships between horses and children (and adults) are developed. Also, beef cattle and chickens need to be fed and gardens need to be cultivated and harvested. Community members join in the Unbound Grace mission of health focused youth programming by sharing their gifts and talents and mentoring children in their areas of personal interest including: woodworking, arts, music, dance, sports etc. Children enjoy learning from adults who are passionate about sharing their love - meanwhile cooperative team building is experienced and new community relationships are sown.

For my daughter and I, Sentinel Farms has brought us to a place of friendship, sharing and sweet serenity; a place where we share a common vision as mother and daughter.

One of my desires in life was to learn how to care for and ride a horse, although I never had the courage until I came to Sentinel Farms. I now am beginning a new adventure at age 55, participating in classical horsemanship!

For my daughter, she is following a desire to embark on an Agricultural program in school this upcoming school year but most importantly, her time spent at Sentinel Farms has helped her in the healing process in the tragic loss of a dear friend

In conclusion , it is my sincere hope, that when darkness surrounds our children (and it will), that we can rally together as a universe and keep them safe from the storms, give them love and let it surround them..... through "UNBOUND GRACE" .

Emily Dion, Starksboro

All my life I have had a passion for horses; something about them made me fall in love. When I was 9, I started taking lessons using my cousin's horse as well as at different barns for about four years. Then I decided to take a break for a little while and try something different. Last summer it occurred to me how much I enjoyed horses and how much I wanted to ride them again. I expressed these feelings to my mom, who has also always wanted to try horseback riding herself but has been too afraid to try. For years, Mom and I had driven past the beautiful property of Sentinel Farms and wondered if they offered riding lessons. One hot August day we decided to explore what the barn had to offer. We waited on the front porch for Kerry to come back from the pasture with her camp students. After the campers were settled and eating their lunches, Kerry spent time with us and we learned about the focus of the farm and her beloved program, UNBOUND GRACE. After talking with Kerry, my mom and I knew that Sentinel Farms was a perfect fit.

In today's society, attending high school can be one of the most difficult obstacles a person will face in their lifetime, with so many things to worry and think about, all kinds of things can go wrong. I think the program Unbound Grace can be a huge benefit to so many kids in our society. Unbound Grace lets kids express who they truly are without getting judged and lets them have tremendous amounts of fun in a safe learning environment.

I recently lost a best friend to suicide. Sometimes, I just wish she knew how many things she had had to look forward to in life. High School was just a storm that was eventually going to run out of rain.

My freshman year of high school, she and I had Spanish class together. We would always sit next to each other and help each other with work, take goofy selfies, and talk about her basketball games and see which ones I could go to - to cheer her on. The summer of sophomore year, we became the best of friends. We would have back to back sleepovers, staying up to all hours of the night gossiping, sharing secrets and making delicious midnight snacks. She was one of the few people I knew I could tell anything too, and I knew she would keep it to herself. She was a one of a kind, Best Friend. Beginning of my sophomore year, and her junior year, we would hang-out in school every chance we got. Not a day went by where we didn't eat lunch together. She was always my back bone keeping me strong through any obstacles I faced. I know today I have a beautiful angel looking down on me, telling me to be strong, get good grades in school and to succeed in life. I had always talked about bringing my dear friend to the barn and getting her to take riding lessons with me, but with her busy schedule and the amazing field hockey player she was, somehow it never seemed to work out. October 9th, 2013 is the day I lost one of my best friends, and I know if she would have come to Sentinel Farms and had gotten involved with Unbound Grace, I believe that this organization might have saved my best friends life.
