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## Kids start summer on a horse

**Lori Holcomb**  
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The drive from Julie Williquette's Illinois home took more than four hours. With a van full of kids traveling through Friday night's powerful storm, it wasn't easy getting her family to Battle Creek, but it was well worth it for the ride.

"I wanted a fun way to get the summer started," Williquette said. Her 5-year-old son, Travis, was born with a brain tumor and suffered a stroke several years ago that makes it difficult to control his speech and movements.

On Saturday, Travis was one of 19 kids from six families attending Camp Casey at Windsong Stables in Battle Creek. The one-day non-profit camp offers the families of kids with cancer an intimate day learning about, riding and caring for horses, as well as playing games and making crafts.

Travis's three sisters also were allowed to participate free of charge and Camp Casey staff even provided meals and a two-night hotel stay for the family.

It was an opportunity for the Williquettes to forget hospital rooms and doctors for a few hours and just be a family.

"We really wanted to have something fun to do together because we don't know what's going to happen," she said of Travis's condition.

Molly Melamed of Farmington Hills started the camp in 2004 in honor of Casey Foote, a 12-year-old who died of bone cancer in 2003 that she met while working at a riding center in Lansing. The camp travels throughout the state operating on the generosity of local businesses who donate food and supplies for the camp.

After having such a great time at Camp Casey last summer, Mabel Thomas said her 6-year-old daughter Caroline and 9-year-old son Jacob have been looking forward to returning ever since. Over the past year, Caroline suffered a series of complications from an ongoing struggle with brain cancer. There were times when Caroline lost almost complete control of her neurological system and could barely feed herself.

Saturday, however, as she sat atop a horse that weighed many pounds than herself, Caroline called the shots.

"It's so nice just to be out and do what any average kid could do and just to forget about all the hard stuff," Mabel said.

As the nervous, excited and grinning kids each climbed aboard the horses, they appeared to gain confidence with each lap around the arena. Equine safety director Jessica Moore said having control over something more powerful than themselves can have a substantial impact on kids, whose illnesses give them so little control over their lives otherwise.

At least in her son's case, Julie Williquette said Moore seems to be right.

"It makes him smile so much when he's sitting up there on a big horse," Williquette said. "Something about it seems to make him feel better."

For more information or to donate to Camp Casey, visit [www.camp-casey.org](http://www.camp-casey.org).

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