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Children with cancer find respite at Camp Casey

By Eric Tingwall
Lansing State Journal

The helmets, saddle pads and riding gear inside the brightly painted 5-by-8-foot Camp Casey travel trailer wield more than the power to rein a horse.

They have the ability to erase the pain of cancer, if just for one day.

The mobile horse camp provides an emotionally therapeutic experience for young cancer patients and their families, said Molly Melamed, the camp's executive director.

The recently donated trailer enables the camp to travel to host farms across the state.

Today, the trailer will deliver supplies to the Beekman Therapeutic Riding Center where 19 children will experience Camp Casey.

"There's not a lot out there that kids with cancer can do," said Ann Adrian of Lansing whose 7-year-old son David will attend the camp for his third time on Saturday.

"Seeing that amount of people coming together for him, I think that was something he really got out of it."



(Photo by Becky Shink/Lansing State Journal)
Horse time: Molly Melamed (left), founder and executive director of Camp Casey, and volunteer Learned Foote organize riding helmets Friday for children and their families who will attend the camp today at the Beekman Therapeutic Riding Center.

About Camp Casey

- Camp Casey is a one-day horse camp for young cancer patients or survivors and their families. The camp travels to host farms across Michigan about once a month during the summer.
- For more information, or to volunteer, donate or register a camper visit www.camp-casey.org or call (248) 705-2780.

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David looks forward to "racing" on a horse today - and forgetting about cancer.

"It keeps my mind on horses," he said of the camp.

During the one-day camp, kids learn to lead, groom and ride horses, along with participating in craft and team building activities.

"It's really apparent that they're not thinking about cancer once the whole day," said Melamed, who founded the camp.

About half of the children at today's camp are cancer patients or survivors. The rest are their brothers and sisters.

"What we really have found to be very true is that cancer does not just affect the child going through the treatment, it affects the siblings and the mother and the father and the grandparents," Melamed said.

The camp is named after Casey Foote, a Grand Ledge girl who died at the age of 12 in 2003 from brain and bone cancer.

The camp is currently held once a month during the summer. Since it's start three years ago, the camp has continually expanded, adding more sessions as well as serving more campers.

"We have the manpower, and we have the vision and the energy to do more," Melamed said.

Part of that dream is towing the trailer - and the camp - to other states.

"Hopefully, we can expand to the point where we're not only traveling in Michigan," Melamed said, "What started as a little weekend project has now become a nonprofit that is reaching children all throughout Michigan, and we have a vision to reach children all across the nation."

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