



'It's incredible': How kind Canberra welcomed a boy and his horse

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Body

Everywhere Angel goes on his epic adventure, strangers show they care.

Sascha Yeomans is proof a mother's love knows no bounds.

When her now 15-year-old son Angel was [born with cerebral palsy](#), doctors told her he would never walk, talk, eat or move independently. She even had to fight to take her newborn home from the hospital.

The Victorian mum has spent years researching and implementing new strategies to improve Angel's mobility and independence.

She found horse riding to be the most effective therapy for helping Angel physically and inspiring his confidence and understanding of his potential.

Now, Angel is having the adventure of a lifetime.

He and his mum and her 14-year-old god-daughter, ***Iluka*** Thieme, with four horses and an assistance dog called Celeste, are horseback riding the National Trail, this week stopping in Canberra for Christmas.

And, like everywhere else on the National Trail, they have been moved by the kindness of strangers.

Pegasus Rising for the Disabled in Holt put them up in a common room, giving them the luxury over the Christmas break of a roof overhead, showers, toilets and a kettle (!) for tea.

"What else do you need?" a gleeful Sascha said.

And a random encounter at the post office in Yarralumla delivered them a beautiful Christmas lunch with new friends.

Sasha had sent ahead a box of dehydrated food to the post office in Yarralumla and got talking to a local woman, Tash Leonard, when she went to pick it up.

"She asked us what we were doing for Christmas and we said we didn't have plans; she invited us for lunch with her family, which was amazing," Sascha said.

"We've had just so many kind offers."

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Persistent rain in winter played havoc with the horses' hooves and the little party stayed for two weeks at the showgrounds in Taralga, north-east of Canberra, so the horses could rest and heal.

"Somebody put a notice on their community Facebook page, and I think the whole town turned out. People just came past with meals and wines and coffee and wood and meat. So much meat! It was incredible," Sascha said.

On an earlier visit to Canberra, they had also tried to connect with the Kambah Pony Club to find a place to stay, but couldn't find any contact numbers or get any responses from emails or social media messages.

"Then this car stopped by the side of the road, and it was this young woman and she went, 'Oh you've got horses, what are you doing?' So we told her what we were doing and that we were hoping to stay at the Kamba pony club and she said, 'Oh, my mum's the secretary, I'll bring the key around, just message me when you arrive'," Sascha said.

"And it just feels like the whole trail has been like that.

"Every day you are walking into the unknown and every morning there is that little anxious feeling of, 'What are we going to face? and 'What's ahead'". And, every day, unexpected doors open and it's incredible."

The National Trail runs along the Great Dividing Range, covering 5330km from Healesville in Victoria to Cooktown in Queensland. The trail follows old stock routes and bush tracks as well as cutting through private property. Former National Party member for Monaro, Peter Cochran, one of the volunteer trail coordinators, also invited Sascha, Angel and Iluka to stay on his property in the Snowy Mountains, which includes part of the trail.

Sascha, who is from Beechworth in Victoria, has been preparing Angel for the ride for six years, gradually getting him used to horses and being in the saddle solo. As puberty hit, Angel was facing musculoskeletal-skeletal issues that his mum wanted to do "everything to prevent", including scoliosis.

Ahead of riding the trail, mother and son rode the 480km Tasmanian Trail, from Devonport to Dover, raising more than \$16,000 for Riding for the Disabled Australia.

They have now been riding the southern parts of the National Trail, on and off, over the past year.

Six hours in the saddle every day riding the trail has strengthened Angel, both physically and mentally. And he's progressed in leaps and bounds. From hardly balancing on the horse to being able to get up in the saddle by himself and then ride for hours

"In Kosciuszko, he was off the lead, normally I lead him, and he was rising trot for three or four hours of the day and singing loudly. I never would have thought that was possible. Unbelievable," Sasha said.

"Angel's walk has also improved dramatically. It was actually the Children's Hospital in Melbourne that first suggested we try horse riding to improve a whole lot of issues that were going on. And it's been better than we ever imagined. Not just physically, but emotionally. Learning how to put animals first and take responsibility for things."

Angel has also grown in confidence and is now talking about one day traveling to Europe with Iluka.

"I think being a disabled person in a regional area like we were, you're very limited," Sascha said.

"This has given him such a sense of the world being possible."

After Canberra, they are heading north, taking each day as it comes, but then taking a break for the hottest part of summer, resuming in autumn.

"If we could ride the whole of NSW, that would be good. We'll go into Queensland and see. I'm not thrilled with crocodiles," Sascha said, with a laugh.

"But we might just get in the groove."

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The ride takes enormous preparation and planning by Sascha and her husband, Tom, who coordinates it all from back home in Victoria. That includes making sure Angel, who has a big appetite, remains well-fed. Amazonia protein powders ended up as a sponsor, helping them keep up Angel's energy.

Sascha also sends ahead boxes of freeze-dried meats and dehydrated vegetables from Campers Pantry to various locations on the trail.

She and Angel have, over the years, also learnt how to do a myriad of practical things, from how to tie a good knot to put together a light pack.

And Sasha works hard to prevent, as much as possible, anything from going wrong on the trail.

"Safety is so important," she said.

"We've got packs on every horse, not just one horse. Every horse has some form of shelter on them and some form of food for a night or two. And some form of warmth on them. And we've all got backpacks that have compasses and water and first aid, snake bandages, whistles, an emergency SOS device.

"The dog, one of the horses and Angel all have satellite tracking collars on them in case we lose them. The horses have bells on them at night. Our whole campsite is reflective and high-vis."

Sascha, like any teenage boy, is not one to heap praise on his mum. But it's clear he loves his "fun" mum.

"She's a good mum," he said.

And **Iluka** will soon be heading back home to resume school.

"It's been so incredible to be on this journey with people I love," she said.

They're also very appreciative of the help they received from Pegasus.

Pegasus Riding for the Disabled in the ACT has for decades known the joys and benefits of horse riding for people with disabilities. The much-loved organisation will in 2025 celebrate its 50th birthday, the first meeting of the association that would become Pegasus taking place in June, 1975.

Pegasus CEO Matt Watson said it was more than happy to help Angel, Sasha and **Iluka** - and their horses and Celeste the dog - have a place to stay at its Holt headquarters over Christmas.

Mr Watson actually met Sascha at a conference a year ago.

"Once I heard about what they were doing, I said 'Make sure when you get to Canberra you come and say g'day'," he said.

"It was fantastic talking to them and hearing about their trip. I think it just shows, again, the magic of horse riding and how it can open up a new world for people with disabilities."

- You can follow Angel's adventures on the National Trail on his Instagram page [roughandstumble](#)
- Donations to Pegasus Riding for the Disabled in Canberra can be made at www.pegasusact.com.au/

Graphic

Angel Cropley on his horse Pippin with mum Sascha Yeomans at one of their stopovers while riding the National Trail, Pegasus Riding for the Disabled in Canberra. Picture by Gary Ramage

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[Angel Cropley on his horse Pippin with mum Sascha Yeomans at one of their stopovers while riding the National Trail, Pegasus Riding for the Disabled in Canberra. Picture by Gary Ramage](#)

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