**Hannah's Story:**

Over the last few years since Hannah's Autism diagnosis I have struggled with the idea of the puzzle piece representing Autism. I would often question what it was supposed to mean? That our girl is missing s piece? That her pieces aren't fitting together? That something isn't just how it should be? To us Hannah is perfect just the way she is. Autism is just a unique piece of her personality not a piece that is broken. Recently I had a break through as I pondered over how far Hannah has come. Fourteen months ago she didn't make eye contact. A year ago she was completely nonverbal. Six months ago she didn't acknowledge peers and before she started riding lessons in September she didn't notice our family dog. The puzzle pieces aren't about who Hannah is or isn't. She is just exactly who she is a loving, singing, snugly, hilarious, ornery, stealthy, and whip smart beautiful young girl. The puzzle pieces are the programs that have given her the voice both literally and figuratively to share those parts of herself with us. For that we are incredibly blessed.

This Summer I looked into different options to help Hannah continue to grow. She needed to build core strength, fine motor skills, self-confidence and an understanding of personal space. We couldn't possibly fit in another therapy through the week days and she was already doing occupational therapy in school. She deserved a chance to connect with someone other than a teacher or parent. She needed to build a trusting bond while having the opportunity to lead. When Inspiration Stables was suggested I thought this might be the outside the box therapy she needed to tie all these things together. The moment she put that helmet on I knew she was in her element. Her smiles said it all.

Every week she sat taller in the saddle. She started using her commands "walk on" and "whoa" in class. I cried with overwhelming pride and she giggled with each trot. A few weeks into lessons Hannah started petting our dog. She would give him nice long strokes and say "good dog". One day in class she looked at the student sitting next to her and put her hand under his chin looking directly into his eyes! The next day she decided to stroked the shoulder of the student next to her. She was making the connections! Her fine motor skills started growing in leaps and bounds. After each lesson she was energized and excited. It has been such a beautiful experience to share. We can't wait to get back to riding this Spring. Thank you Inspiration Stables for all you have done for our family and our sweet Hannah. Your dedication is life changing!

**Myles’ Story:**

Our first week of lessons, we had a young boy with autism come for his first horse experience ever. He is highly sensory, and the flies were making him very agitated. He wasn’t sure about being on the horse at first and was very nervous. After about ten minutes of walking on his horse, Myles took a deep breath, let out a sigh, and smiled. He found a happy place. When he came back the next week for his second lesson, I asked his mom how his week was, and she shared his incredible story: “Myles has 10 minutes of social skills class every day at school where he is supposed to talk conversationally and maintain eye contact. This is usually like pulling teeth. This week I got an email from his teacher telling me that he had openly shared about his horse, Julio. She asked if I could send some pictures of Myles and Julio. I did. His teacher helped him put together a short presentation about his riding experience to share with his social skills class. Myles did so well that he was able to present for his entire first grade class. He’s never done that before and usually struggles to connect with his classmates as he has very little in common with them. I can’t thank you enough.” During his third week of lessons it was very cold and windy, so we were all unsure of how Myles would do. He jumped right up on Julio and gave him a hug! He was completely unaffected by sensory interruptions.

Myles has continued riding with us every session offered since the very beginning. His family has gone through some difficult changes in the last year, but the relationship Myles has built with his horse and his very special volunteer who works with him weekly has helped him through and given him something fun to look forward to. Riding has changed his life!

**Lauren’s Story:**

Lauren and Greg Johnson are two incredible blessings to Inspiration Stables. Greg advocated for Inspiration Stables before we were even providing services. He believed very strongly in our mission and what it could do for his daughter, Lauren. His passion for Inspiration Stables took many forms including helping to get our facilities ready to begin lessons, unloading hay, doing a video interview for our pilot program, and countless more. His support was far reaching, and it means the world to us. The world lost Greg too soon in April, and to keep him memory alive, we created the Greg Johnson Volunteer Award in his honor. It is an annual reminder to us of his amazing selflessness for our organization.

Because of Greg, we had the blessing of knowing Lauren! Lauren's journey with us started shortly after Greg's passing. Greg's parents brought her out to visit the horses and take a short ride. She was all smiles and giggles! We were blessed to have Lauren come back many times for lessons. We started at about ten minutes of ride time and finished at 45 minutes! She learned everything from grooming and mounting to steering and beginning to post. With very little verbal communication, we look to Lauren's expressions to show us how she's doing. She loved to play games and give high fives! Lauren's most exciting accomplishment was saying, "walk on" for the first time and asking her horse to go. She completely understood and did well with leg pressure, but adding the words was amazing!! We are so proud of Lauren and how hard she worked...she inspired us every chance she had!

*Lauren’s mom adds…*

McCain always was so calm and sweet with Lauren. You and he were instrumental in helping me, helping Lauren and helping Greg’s parents start to come to terms with his passing. I just remember that first day we were all at the camp together. It was literally a combination of your kindness and patience, along with McCain’s good nature, getting us through a tough morning. Whether or not you were aware, it was an emotionally charged time, and your and McCain’s nature were such a blessing.

**Abby & Brookes’ Story:**

Watching Abby and Brooke develop confidence and core strength during their riding lessons this year has been an incredible blessing! They started very timid and not even wanting to get on the horse and ended riding independently with big smiles. Seeing them interact with their horses and the volunteers who served showed incredible growth throughout this year. They are amazing girls who have worked so hard! We can't wait to see how far they go next year. We are grateful for them and their incredible family for all their support!!

*Abby and Brooke's mom shares...*

Abby and Brooke and their horseback riding ventures are something they treasure and talk about weekly even while not riding. They are sure to wear their Inspiration Stables   
sweatshirts at least once a week to school and ask for anything horse related. Abby's favorite line is "I'm a horse girl!" Brooke's confidence was so apparent during her riding and has continued, I can't wait to see how far she will go next go around of lessons. When I ask Brooke what her favorite part of riding is...she repeats, "Jackson, Jackson, Jackson, Jackson!"

**Lucy’s Story:**

Lucy came to us so excited to ride a horse! Her enthusiasm was abounding. She was confident and ready to go. Lucy’s goal in her riding lessons was to work on “lefty,” as she needs to develop her strength on the left side after experiencing a stroke. When Lucy first began riding, certain horses were harder for her to stay balanced and centered on. She had to work really hard to build her strength. Lucy progressed from two sidewalkers with a thigh hold, to one, then only someone walking next her to without contact. In her hippotherapy sessions, Lucy rode backwards, on her hands and knees, and sideways all to develop her core strength and work on “lefty.” Her dexterity with “lefty” grew significantly from the start of riding. She is able to hold the reins with more control and give her horse direction with her leg. Lucy has come so far in reaching her goal! She is an absolute delight and blessing to us all! Her focus and determination are humbling. Watching her grow and progress this year has truly been unbelievable.

*Lucy’s mom adds…*

The growth Lucy has experience can not be measured. The light in her eyes during each session is truly remarkable. We are so blessed to have the opportunity for Lucy to experience therapeutic riding and hippotherapy in her rehabilitation journey.