

Life *in the* Valley

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PHOTOS BY ANNA REED / STATESMAN JOURNAL

Garrett Kincaid, a sophomore from Lyons, pets a horse during a field trip with Oregon Connections Academy to Horses of Hope, an equine therapy program, in Turner on Thursday, Nov. 17.

Forging a stable bond

ORCA students witness equine therapy at Horses of Hope

JUSTIN MUCH
STAYTON MAIL

You learn something new every day, and often that instruction is close to home.

That was the experience a number of Oregon Connections Academy students discovered during a recent outing to rural Turner where the youth received hands-on stable lessons along with insight into an innovative therapy at Horses of Hope.

"I learned just how big of an impact equine therapy had on the people it helped. Many people with different problems, whether they be mental, emotional, or physical, came to this to receive help," said Garrett Kincaid, 16, of Lyons. "They have multiple horses, each with his or her own distinct personality, ready to help anyone with a disability that walked through the front door. They would take them for rides, or just have the people lead them around the arena, feed and groom them, or just spend time together."

Garrett was impressed by the special bonds formed between the people and the horses.

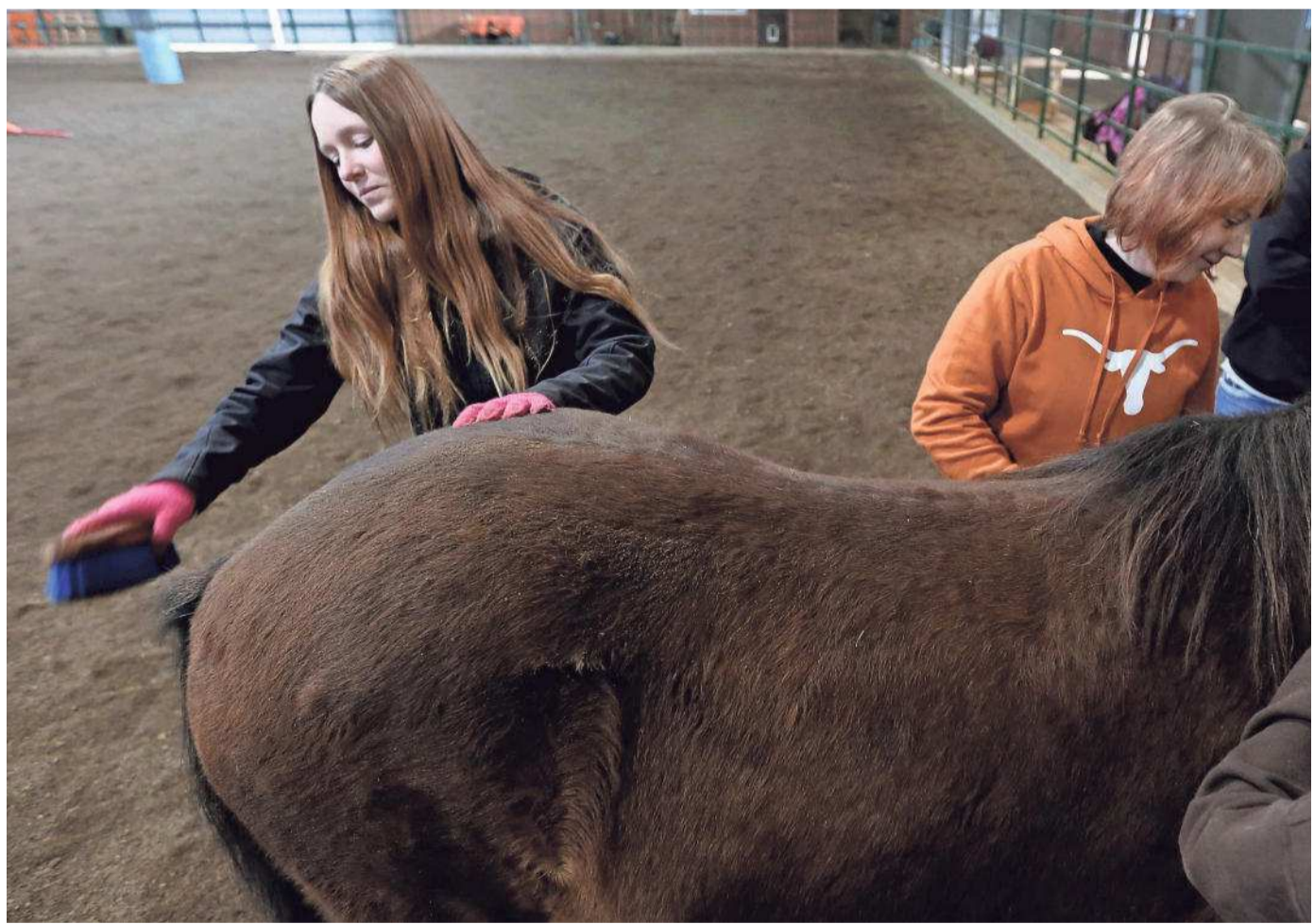
"I did not know that this kind of therapy was available to people before the time I spent there," he said. "I honestly haven't thought of horses the same way ever since that trip to Horses of Hope. I knew that horses were gentle, friendly, and great company, but I never expected it to be on this scale. They work magic on the people they are with, and it is incredible."

Garrett wasn't alone in his observations.

"I have never, in person, experienced how animals are used in therapy other than animal shows on TV," said Cassandra Luckini, 15, of Crabtree. "After being on this field trip, it makes me want to explore how these animals can help people with autism or emotional or physical limitations."

Garrett and Cassandra's contemporary, Ella Fay of Turner, added:

"I didn't know that Horses of Hope was so close to my house. I think it's really cool that the kids get to work with the horses. Horses are good to use in therapy because they are very sweet. Even though they are big animals, they can sense a person's feelings. I've



Michael Wood, left, a freshman from Scio, and Ella Fay, a sophomore from Turner, brush Nupur, an Icelandic horse.

worked with horses before so I know how to take care of them, it felt natural. I would love to go again."

That's saying something since this particular ORCA field trip involved not only a lesson but a bit of labor as well.

"There was a bit of work involved in taking care of the horses, yes. But you have to expect that when working with any animal, and it was super fun," Garrett said. "After seeing what they can do for people, and after learning how great it was to work in that setting, I decided to fill out a volunteer application, so that I could help and be a part of this great program."

He may have some company. "I liked doing the chores and tending to the horses," said Sidney Kincaid, 15, of Lyons. "I find it peaceful and fun. Brushing the dirt out of their mane and coat, grooming, feeding, and just plain loving them was a blast."

"I always loved horses. Now that I got to see how they help people who have disabilities, it made me fall in love with them all over again on a whole new level."



Cassandra Luckini, a sophomore from Albany, pets Max, a draft-cross horse.