

# Blue Rider Messenger

Serving over 400 children and adults annually from the Berkshires and beyond  
**Year End Report 2023**

Every year we look back at the monumental work we did in the past year. The weather and tragedies tend to rear their head first; then come all of the great moments, which are often so fleeting but happen every day and really outweigh the rest.

We have had some hard losses from December to April, which have taken a long time to get over. The theme for our Circus - Inviting the Inner Child - was instrumental in helping fill voids with joy and inspiration, wonderment and growth.

Our job every morning is to embrace the day with "How are you?" and "I am here and present, where will our journey together take us today?" Being present and in the moment, finding a way to consent to mutual work and embrace growth, no matter what that looks like, is the journey our equines help with every day, and why we do what we do in our little blue barn.

Our rock to stand on is you, our community and donors. You carry us forward into the next exhilarating year of facing challenges, putting our best effort forward, and managing to allow beauty and growth for all that need it.

We have - as always - come through this last year strong and stable, full of wisdom and ideas to find magic and move forward into an uplifting future.

*Christine and Becky*



## A view from the business office...



With a view of the barn and fields from my window, the business office of Blue Rider Stables sits on the hill above. I am amazed at how unique the business functions are here, much like the rest of Blue Rider.

Basic office functions are the same for most businesses but in my first year as Director of Office Administration I have become familiar with the unique fluid movement throughout the year (sometimes throughout the day), the changing seasons, changing

programs, changing clients- always in motion. And yet there remains stability in the way we approach whatever comes our way. Decisions are always made with an eye to the best interest of our equines, our clients, our staff and the business as a whole.

Operating in two separate locations can be challenging, as we are so often "in the moment" as Christine mentioned, but united in the way we look at what we can do better, how we can communicate within this fluidity, how we can make Blue Rider better for all. It takes flexibility, patience, a sense of humor, our shared mission and an eye to the future. I look forward to coming to work everyday, there is always much to do and I am so excited by the possibilities for Blue Rider yet to come.

*Letty Malin*

# BLUE RIDER



STABLES INC.

## Founding Director

Christine Sierau

## Board of Directors

Don Chester, *Chair*  
Julia Kadison, *Secretary*  
Tayo Kaufman, *Treasurer*  
Rebecca Daddona  
Louise Weingrod

## Staff

Rebecca Daddona  
*Co-Director, Head Instructor*  
Letty Malin  
*Co-Director, Director of Office Administration*  
Christine Sierau,  
*Instructor*  
Avery Ball  
*Assistant Instructor*  
Caitlyn Snyder  
*Barn Manager*  
Nell Hanley  
*Barn Assistant*  
Maggie McRae  
Jacky Boyd  
Jin Fernbacher  
Kaitlyn Howell  
*Barn Support*

Blue Rider Stables, Inc.  
15 Farm Lane  
South Egremont, MA  
Mailing Address:  
PO Box 924  
Great Barrington, MA  
01230

## A report from the Chairman of the Board

2023 was a transitional year throughout for the Board of Blue Rider Stables. We have added two new members and lost a seasoned veteran.

From within the staff ranks as Head Instructor, **Rebecca Daddona** has stepped up and assumed an active role on our Board of Directors. Becky was officially installed in May. Her experience and insight bring a hands-on approach to our governance and help facilitate the needed cooperation and positive working relationship between Board and Staff.

After decades of loyal dedicated service to the institution, **Anna Stanton** stepped down as President of the Board in June. Anna still maintains an active role as a member of the Fundraising Committee, helping to plan events for the coming year.

Later in the year, another new member joined us. **Louise Weingrod** is an active rider at Blue Rider Stables, in December, she came to us expressing an interest and willingness to become a Board member. She was unanimously installed soon thereafter. Louise brings to Blue Rider a wealth of corporate, legal and tax expertise. She has served on the boards of several not-for-profit organizations. She and her husband Bob recently retired to Egremont, so we have the incredible fortune of having international experience right here in our own backyard.



Louise Weingrod  
Board Member

The Board of Blue Rider Stables is adopting new policies and nurturing new relationships in the non-profit world. We have actively been involved with and regularly participate in events hosted by the Southern Berkshire Chamber of Commerce, the Non-Profit Center for the Berkshires and Berkshire 1. We have also become a member of Philanthropy Massachusetts, a network for connecting non-profit organizations like us with prospective donors. Everywhere that we plug in increases our exposure to the support we need to sustain our programs, our operation, our facilities, and our future.

I would also like to express my sincerest gratitude to **Julia Kadison** and **Tayo Kaufman** for the continuous unselfish dedication and service that they both provide to Blue Rider, as active members of our Board.

Our strengthened Board is excited to move into the future, working with Blue Rider's dedicated staff.

On the docket:

- fortify Blue Rider's strategic growth plan,
- devise a capital plan and raise funds for facilities expansion,
- reach and involve an even broader community that can benefit from our programs.

Sincerely,

**Don Chester**, Chairman



## **We are very excited to introduce our new donkey!**

In October of 2023 we were able to adopt a 6 year old donkey from a rescue in Vermont, who we named Arlo. He is friendly, gentle, calm, and curious. He is a friend and guide to our aging donkeys- Billy Boy, who has age-related hearing and vision loss, and Taquito, who has severe arthritis in his neck and back.



He has fit in nicely, taking over donkey duties, like braying for food and attention, being cute and cuddly, and guarding the rest of the herd. He stands guard when Billy and Taquito rest, and all in all just seems to feel at home! He loves people and cuddles.

Best of all, he has decided that playing is his top job, and he engages all the horses in wild games, and brings joy and energy into the herd. The moral of the herd (and the humans) has definitely lightened since he joined us. We are happy to have him, and can't wait to see what he has in store for us!

## **Buildings and Grounds**

2023 was one of the most challenging years for grounds maintenance we have had.

Burning season was canceled due to wind, making spring clean-up nearly impossible. Dry weather meant we



spread over 50 loads of composted manure on the pastures before the horses went out, thanks to our trusty friend Ted Vining. Summer rains and wind made it hard to keep up with pasture maintenance, and no hay could be made. There were trees down nearly every week, and our woods and pastures were inaccessible for much of the season. Nonetheless, the horses had enough pasture to stay healthy and well. The rotation of the pas-

tures keeps our environment and grounds healthy as well. The dry spring let us get our first 1000 bales of hay in by June 1, a record. However, the wet summer made getting the rest of the hay a challenge. We didn't get any hay in June or July, getting the last of our hay in September.

Our Scavenger Hunt in the spring and Pasture Walk in the fall helped participants see how much pasture space the horses have, and how much work goes into keeping this safe for them.

*Tom Sierau*

## **And welcome new staff...**

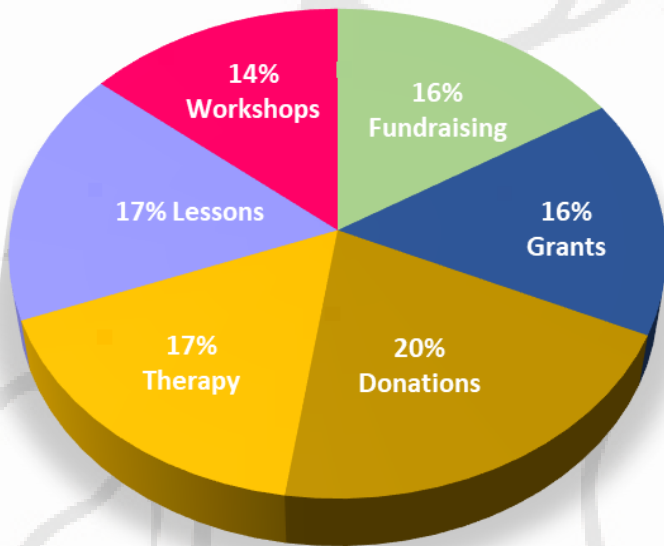
Nell Hanley joined the Blue Rider staff in October of 2023. Having recently returned to the northeast after 16 years in Wyoming, Nell taught creative writing and literature at the University of Wyoming, tutored at the UW Writing Center, and ran her own bare-foot hoof care practice. Nell does a little bit of everything at Blue Rider: feeding, mucking, grooming, and helping with lessons and therapy.



# 2023 At a Glance

## SERVICES DELIVERED IN 2023

- Students - 415 Total
- 143 Adults, 272 children
- Therapy: 83 adults, 49 children
- 121 Year round students,
- 108 Seasonal, 171 One time
- Average weekly instructor lessons: 104

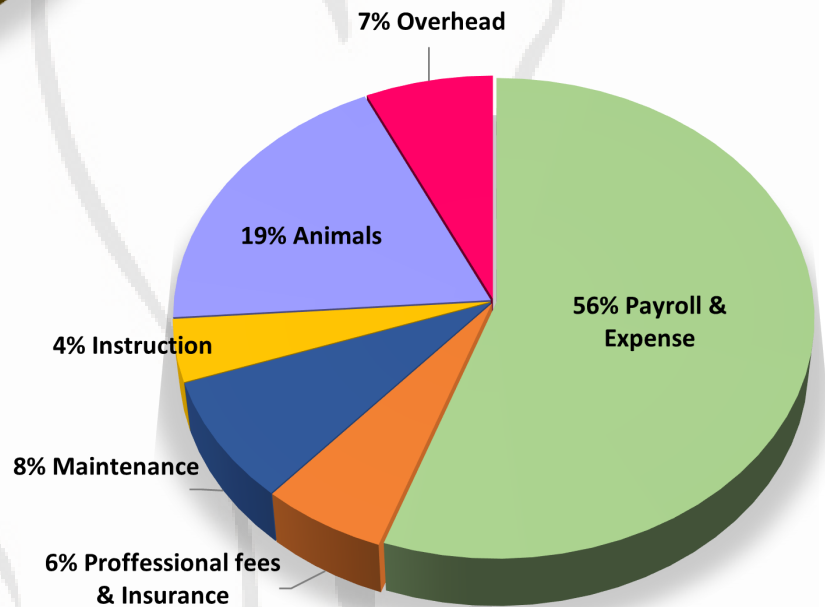


## 2023 Income

Fundraising	\$76,968
Grants	\$75,081
Donations	\$97,903
Therapy	\$80,255
Lessons	\$80,849
Workshops	\$66,513
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$477,569</b>

## 2023 Expense

Payroll & Expense	\$242,982
Professional fees & Insurance	\$26,250
Maintenance	\$36,246
Instruction	\$18,383
Animals	\$84,108
Overhead	\$30,511
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$438,480</b>



*We are grateful for the Grant funds we received from:*

Berkshire Farm Fund	Berkshire Life Charitable fund	Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation
Coolidge Hill Foundation	Donald C. McGraw Foundation	Fitzgerald-Sexton Fund
Janey Fund Charitable Trust	Joshua Harr Shane Foundation	Moses Feldman Family Foundation
PayPal Giving Fund	Saibel Foundation, Inc.	UKOGF Foundation



## *All Abilities Garden Program*

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Blue Rider started a garden project years ago, and every year the staff commit to starting again. They do get enough peas and tomatoes to have lunch, but by midsummer the time pressures of lessons and summer programs take over. In the Spring of 2023, Christine Sierau and I had a conversation regarding Blue Riders garden space in need of attention. After a brief exchange, we quickly understood our visions aligned and the All Abilities Garden program was born. We are an extension of Blue Rider Stables vision for community, connection and caring for the land and animals.

The *All Abilities Garden* program is about restoring the land, healing and caring for one another and creating community through purposeful and collaborative efforts.

In a few short months, working two hours a day for two days a week, a plucky crew took a weed-choked plot and transformed it into a beautiful garden, where people of all abilities collaborate to fulfill the vision of a space within Blue Rider, that heals the land, the body, and the spirit. Thus far we have only used recycled, salvaged, repurposed and donated materials.

The garden beds are ready for new life, there is space to sit, ponder and enjoy nature, and the sense of community is awesome. The crew has taken on Blue Riders garden beds, and the space around their office as well. In addition to gardening we do land work, raking and bagging leaves, clearing invasives, cutting down and hauling away dead trees and building a Cold Frame from salvaged materials this winter. Community service, collaborating and connecting with other neighboring organizations is part of who we are.

The All Abilities Garden is now a year-round program collaborating with Blue Rider, growing possibilities for the participants, the land, and the community. Look for our farm stand this year!

*Deb Hertzell*

Creator & Director

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Hannah has been around horses all her life as rider, groomer, and general horse whisperer. In her last residential setting, she was not able to actually ride due to balance difficulties, and I did not expect for her to advance beyond side walkers and lead rope riding at Blue Rider.

Christine did not limit Hannah's experience to what she had done in the past, or to any preconceived definition of disability. Within 3 months, Hannah was often riding without any human supports, depending of course on her physical capacity in the moment. She was communicating and directing her horse with her own body movements. It has been one of the most joyful and rewarding parts of her life which is otherwise marked by ongoing physical loss.

In her own words: *"Riding at Blue Rider makes me forget about what I have (my disease)" - MP*





**Cathy and Zora**

### **Leasing Zora has changed my relationship with her and with Blue Rider.**

Zora and I had connected very early on in my time at Blue Rider, and I took it as a tremendous sign of trust that I was offered the opportunity to lease her.

The lease relationship is so very special: increased time with the horse, increased responsibility for their health and well-being, and a much deeper connection that continues to build over time. My relationship with Zora is something that I cherish, and I am so grateful that that relationship has been nurtured through my lease.

There are many practical benefits of leasing, including the ability to ride and groom Zora whenever she has time in her schedule. More importantly, it has increased my feeling of connection and responsibility with and for her - she is **my** horse! It requires increased responsibility to Zora, but I also have a reciprocal feeling of the responsibility she takes for me. I ride Zora much more independently as part of my lease - I'm encouraged to problem solve on my own, though help is always nearby.

This new independence has required that I continuously increase the responsibility for myself and my riding, which is a challenge but a significant impetus to improve. My confidence has grown as my relationship with Zora has grown. It is an essential part of my life, and I am deeply grateful to Blue Rider, and to Zora, for this opportunity.

## **Donors are what make our work possible – we cannot thank you enough!**

John Ahern	Sofiya Akilova	Richard Allen	Jane & Richard Andrias	Kate Andrias
Ron & Sandy Ashendorf	Cynthia Ball	Gretchen Ball	Harry & Judith Ballan	Ann Barrett
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Susanne Hults	Peter Irwin	Jennie & David Jadow	Sara Jarvie	Grace Jeffers
Sherry Johnson	Julia Kadison	Barbara Kalish	Cori Kalser	Mark Kaplan
Kate Amer	Stephanie Kay	Nicola Kean	Sarah Kessler	Alison Kiefer
Phyllis and Howard King	Sophie King	Amanda King	Josh Klausner	Holly Kulka



## We thank our local businesses for their support

Agway	Applebees	Baba Louie's	Back to Heart
Bakin Bakery	Barrington Outfitter	Bella Flora	Berkshire Bike & Board
Berkshire Aviation	Berkshire Baby	Berkshire Bass	Berkshire South
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Wards Nursery	Wash 'n' Wag	Zabian Jewelers	Equipment

*Our daughter, Ellie, has been taking therapeutic horseback riding lessons at Blue Rider Stables for the past three years. Ellie has a rare disease that has caused her to be blind in one eye, deaf in one ear and to have challenges with balance, core strength and mobility. But at Blue Rider, she is never pitied. Instead, she is challenged every time she rides. Christine, Becky and the other staff members at Blue*



*Rider work tirelessly to help Ellie build her physical strength by pushing her and motivating her to work hard. In addition, their knowledge of the body and how best to develop the areas of weakness are incredible. When Ellie was really struggling to ride, Christine developed an innovative support system to assist her on the horse and guided us in exercises to do at home as well. Perhaps more importantly, however, Blue Rider's staff continues to challenge Ellie in ways that build her self-confidence. Because she is pushed in each lesson, she feels proud of what she has accomplished and the progress she has made. And she has the confidence to know that if she can succeed at her riding lesson, she can succeed in the other challenges she will face in life. Despite her disabilities, she approaches every day with a self-assurance that is incredible. And this is in large part because of the physical and mental strength that Blue Rider has developed in her. N.K.*

## *Our Mission*

Our Mission is to offer a holistic educational environment in which people and animals can safely interact, and through their mutual therapeutic experiences broaden the scope of their lives.

## We thank our many donors - the list goes on

Nikki Lamagna	Kevin LaPierre	Kelley Lazarus	Alice Leason	Marilyn Lebowitz
Annabel Lee	Brian Lee	Monica Leleszi	Lena Leonardsson	Roman Leskiw
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Mark Zimora	Leander House, inc.	Blackbaud Giving Fund		

## Our volunteers make miracles happen, and this means so much to us!

<b>Avery Ball</b>	<b>Michael Daddona</b>	<b>Caitlin von Graf</b>	<b>Russ Malin</b>	<b>Amanda Sierau</b>
<b>Gretchen Ball</b>	<b>Kristin Daigle</b>	<b>Sonia Pauley Gulati</b>	<b>Maggie McRae</b>	<b>Paul Sierau</b>
<b>Jeanne Bassis</b>	<b>Jeff Daigle</b>	<b>Kaitlyn Howell</b>	<b>Steve O'Donnell</b>	<b>Caitlyn Snyder</b>
<b>Danielle Bernstein</b>	<b>Juliana Damms</b>	<b>Jennie Jadow</b>	<b>Jonathan Rosen</b>	<b>Jen Solak</b>
<b>Isha Bindra</b>	<b>Kelly Damms</b>	<b>Julia Kadison</b>	<b>Annie Rosenberg</b>	<b>Anna Stanton</b>
<b>Jacky Boyd</b>	<b>Jin Fernbacker</b>	<b>Tayo Kaufman</b>	<b>Wyone Sadhana</b>	<b>Sophy Tuck</b>
<b>Don Chester</b>	<b>Cathy Fracasse</b>	<b>Lena Leonardsson</b>	<b>Ewen Duff-Sanchez</b>	<b>Dierdre Ypma</b>
<b>Raven Cole</b>	<b>May Gantcher</b>	<b>Amy Lyons</b>	<b>Tom Sierau</b>	



Sadly, this was a year of unprecedented loss for us.

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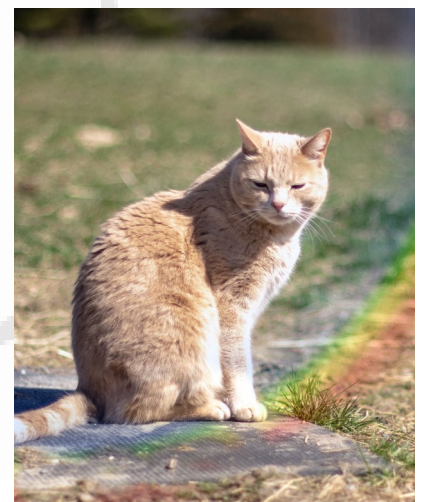
**FALCUR**

Losing Falcur was the most devastating thing to happen to Blue Rider. We had already endured loss unprecedented for us, with Oskar, Baron, and Remedy leaving in such a short stretch of time (and we would lose Desmond too soon after). Every horse, donkey, and barn cat that comes to Blue Rider is loved and valued for who they are, but in his twenty-one years at Blue Rider Falcur touched the lives of more people than we can count. He was an amazing, stunning therapy horse, a steadfast lesson horse, a shoulder to lean and cry on for so many, and a firecracker to ride for the instructors, always eager for an adventure. He was a trusted, wise leader. He could make friends with anyone and got even the most taciturn horses to roughhouse with him; he loved to play the wild stallion, and while he could keep everyone in line without raising a hoof, he could often be seen rearing and running with the other geldings.

Time heals all wounds, but grief takes quite a lot of time and a few months is barely any time at all. Horses live in the present much more than people, but his loss is still felt by much of the herd. Nearly every day we instructors see all the lessons that he could teach almost without us, all the students who would benefit from working with him, all the places where there is a Falcur-shaped hole.



In addition to losing Falcur, we lost Baron and Remedy just two weeks before, and lost our barn cat, Desmond, shortly after. The two geldings we were able to let go on a good day, as an act of kindness, because they were both declining, Baron due to age and Remedy due to prolonged illness. We miss them both greatly, but they both had their people with them and knew they were deeply loved. Desmond fell ill unexpectedly and rapidly, and although we and our vets did everything we could, we were unable to save him. It is a strange thing to come into our barn and have no cats to greet us; hopefully one day we will be ready for a cat again, but not yet.



## A review of 2023 and a look ahead

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Our events are always a way to open up our barn to a greater audience, and share the world we work in with interested people. Our Third Saturday Pony Rides and Open House was often lacking due to weather conditions, but we had many a small visitor on those days. Our *Spring Scavenger Hunt* in April went through the fields instead of the woods because of the extreme wet, and was as fun as ever. *The Circus - Exploring our Inner Child* - was amazing and drew a large crowd. 56 riders showcased small snippets of riding abilities, and our horses and donkeys were amazing. Our *Pasture Walk* in October was very informative, walking the outer fence line of the full properties we graze let our visitors see how much land we caretake, and how much roaming our horses can do. Our *Wings for Willie Walkathon* was less populated, we hope to invigorate this in the future. We had an awesome *Holiday Photoshoot* in December, with special guest *Wanda Houston*.

Our weekly programs in the school breaks and summer really let us get to know our younger clients in a different light as they immersed themselves into the horse life. This is a great balance to the daily lessons. Our donkeys were guests at the June *Farmer's Market* in Sheffield, at the *Customer Appreciation Day* of our local Agway, and again on the *Holiday Walk* in Great Barrington. Over the summer we took horses and donkeys to *Muddy Brook Elementary* to visit their program, and they had so much fun they asked us to come a second time! In September our board organized a *fundraiser with Wanda Houston* at the Great Barrington VFW. We went to the *Equine Affaire* for four days in November, bringing what we do to a very large public, and at the same time taking time to learn for ourselves.

This year our calendar is full again. We just finished our *February Break program*, introducing children to a day at the barn with their "own" horse. We will repeat this program in April, and whenever students have school-free time. Our *Summer Horsemanship Program* will run June 1 through August 30, weekly

\*Third Saturday of every month - Pony Rides and Open House from 2 - 4

\* Spring Scavenger Hunt will be held April 13.

\* Circus - That's Life - will be presented June 1.

\* Wings for Willie Fundraiser will be held the month of October

\*Pasture Walk TBD

\*Possible board fundraiser September 7

We will once again be present at the *Equine Affaire* in Springfield November 7-11, taking our helper students to learn as much as they can about the horse industry.

