



Blue Rider Messenger

Serving over 400 children and adults annually from the Berkshires and beyond
Year End Report 2024

If trust, connection, understanding, communication paired with love, delight, patience and willingness were all that it takes to get by in the world, we would be the richest little barn there is. Our students and our equines thrive here, learning and practicing these intentions. The growth in personal achievements for both horse and human are always thrilling to be part of, and we love seeing the true spirit of each individual shine through in these moments. We are so proud of our students, our herd, and our committed, thoughtful staff and everything they all have achieved this past year. We are proud, too, for helping everyone find their own paths forward. Unfortunately, trust, understanding, love, delight, and patience aren't accepted as currency in the broader world. Although it is easy to see the value in what we do, we have had to work very hard to keep our finances stable in a world where the cost of goods and services continues to increase exponentially. Fundraising might be the hardest part of our job, but we have thrown ourselves into it wholeheartedly to support our horses, who help us support our clients from all walks of life. We are endlessly grateful for everyone who has supported us this year, knowing that you each gave what you could and that every dollar truly does make a difference. We taught more than 6000 lessons here in 2024, and behind the scenes were many hours of horse care and training - though if one watches closely, it is never clear who is training who or who learns the bigger lesson.

Please enjoy excerpts from the year. *Christine and Becky*



From the business office, it sure looks peaceful down at the barn. But there is always much going on behind the scenes at Blue Rider - at the barn and in the business office. The office is one of the more elusive, unseen elements of the business and the day-to-day activity may not be as exciting as what happens in the blue barn but it is just as essential in delivering the services to our community that benefits so many.

2024 brought many new and exciting changes, new staff, new horses, new friends - and new challenges. So, to meet those challenges we are forging ahead, exploring new funding streams and planning exciting events to raise the funds essential to move forward and do what we do best. I am thankful to have the assistance of Avery part-time in the of-

ice, our staff continues to step up wherever they are needed, and I couldn't be prouder to work with such an amazing, dedicated group of individuals who work hard behind the scenes making Blue Rider the amazing place it is. *Letty Malin*

BLUE RIDER



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Sophia Bartolotta
Maggie McRae
Jacky Boyd
Kaitlyn Howell

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A report from the Chairman of the Board

2024 was an event-filled year for Blue Rider Stables. In addition to the thousands of hours of lessons given, there were numerous other activities in which we participated, including a donor reception and annual meeting put on by the Board. We couldn't do any of this without our valuable staff members.

Sophia Bartolotta came to join us in June. She has become an asset to our hard-working team. Caitlyn Snyder achieved her goal of passing the Instructors' Exam and can move up within the ranks. In addition to her hard work at the Barn, Avery has stepped up to help part-time in the office to take up some of the workload from Letty, our diligent Office Manager. Jacky Boyd, Kaitlyn Howell and Maggie McRae continue their unselfish dedication to Blue Rider Stables. And of course, we couldn't do any of this without Becky Daddona and Christine Sierau leading the charge.

We were saddened by the passing of Charles "Chip" Carlson, one of the original founders of Blue Rider Stables. We are ever grateful for his vision. His memory lives on in the sign on our front door.

The Board of Blue Rider Stables is blazing new trails, establishing new relationships and enhancing old ones 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, 1Berkshire, and 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 like to express my sincerest gratitude to Becky Daddona, Julia Kadison, Louise Weingrod and Tayo Kaufman for their continuous unselfish dedication and service that they all 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. We are looking to fortify Blue Rider's strategic growth plan, devise a capital plan and raise funds for facilities expansion, and engage an even broader community that can benefit from our programs.

Don Chester, Chairman

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.



Barn Events Recap

Weather is usually the topic when we recap the year, and always foremost in our thoughts in order to keep the herd and programs safe and comfortable. Our students rose to every challenge the weather threw at us last year, and it showed in the work they did.

Our events continue to be the highlights of our year, letting us interact with our broader community in a really rewarding way. Our Third Saturday Pony Rides and Open House continue to be a hit, with many parents and adults loving the rides. It is so fun



to see the childlike glee in the faces of dads and moms! Our Circus - That's Life - was all we could have wished for and more. Our students really rose to the challenge of presenting what they could do to music, and had a grand time learning. Over 50 riders participated, and

our horses and donkeys were stellar. 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 everything to do with a horse. Our therapy program as well as our year round riding program stayed steady and consistent.

Our events like the Scavenger Hunt, Pasture Walk and Horses after Dark were well attended. We were happy to attend our local Agway's Customer Appreciation Weekend with our three donkeys, as well as the Holiday Stroll in Great Barrington.



Congratulations to our very own founding director
Christine

for being awarded the Southern Berkshire Chamber's
Women in Leadership Award for
Non-profit Mentor-Leader!



We love the community groups that come to us to learn about horse care and themselves.

The South Egremont School comes every spring for a ten-week block, such a highlight for us.

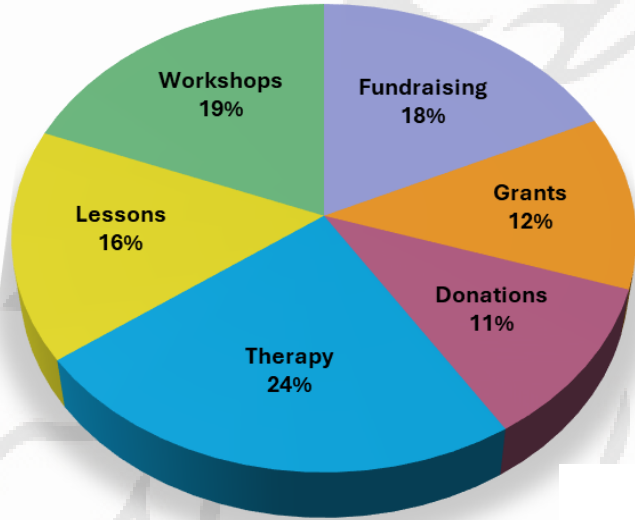


No one in the barn noticed the earthquake we had in April, as we were all outside and thought the tree guys had dropped a particularly large tree. Also, the horses all thought the solar eclipse was a great reason to take an extra nap....

2024 At a Glance

SERVICES DELIVERED IN 2024

- ◆ Students - 359 Total
- ◆ 110 Adults, 249 Children
- ◆ Therapy: - 55 adults, 27 children
- ◆ 53 Summer Program
- ◆ 40 Extended Program Students
- ◆ 6,023 Total Lessons

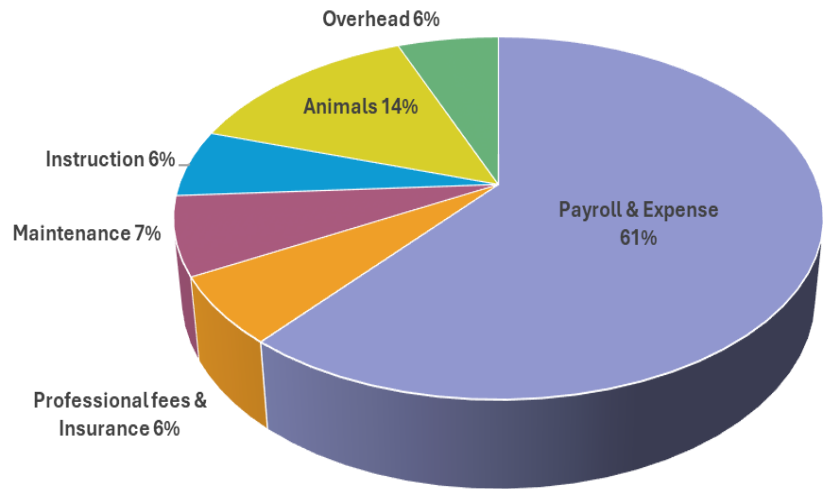


2024 Income

Fundraising	\$75,029
Grants	\$49,017
Donations	\$46,982
Therapy	\$100,543
Lessons	\$70,160
Workshops	\$78,180
Total Income	\$419,911

2024 Expense

Payroll & Expense	\$291,592
Professional fees & Insurance	\$28,144
Maintenance	\$33,280
Instruction	\$29,200
Animals	\$65,964
Overhead	\$28,093
Total Expenses	\$476,273



We are grateful for the Grant funds we received from:

- | | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Alford-Egremont Cultural Council | Berkshire Farm Fund | Berkshire Life Charitable fund |
| Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation | Christopher Reynolds Foundation, Inc. | Coolidge Hill Foundation |
| Donald C. McGraw Foundation | Egremont Cultural Council | Great Barrington Cultural Council |
| Janey Fund Charitable Trust | Levinson Berkshire Opportunity Fund | Myrin Institute, Inc. |
| Shapiro Family Foundation, Inc | Sheffield Cultural Council | UKOGF Foundation |

Comings and goings...

It was hard to say goodbye to Nell, who still remains a part of the team though remotely. We started the year with Nell in the barn, helping us with horse chores, and helping the horses (especially Freyja and Garuda) learn how to use their bodies better, always with her unfailingly kind smile. Unfortunately, due to the shortage of local housing, she had to leave us directly after the Circus.

However, she remains part of the Blue Rider family, and as you see our website gradually improving and updating, it is because she is the magician behind the curtain. Thank you, Nell.

Shortly before Nell left, we met and hired Sophia, who came to us from California, and is still good-naturedly showing her value in the barn, even though New England winters are nothing like California summers....



She writes: I started at Blue Rider stables as a barn assistant in June 2024. I had just graduated from Bard college with a degree in studio arts after the completion of a final gallery show titled 'Freedom Broke'. The work questioned the ethics of the role of the horse within the trail riding industry.

My work as a trail guide began at 18 when a small ranch on the coast of California hired me based on minimal horse experience and education. While the job provided me with western riding experience I was not trained or taught how to ride properly. Our herd was worked very hard and in between rides they stood wearing all of their tack tied to fence posts. I was not encouraged to ask questions about feeds or medications let alone during visits from the vet, dentist, farrier or animal control. Our horses were skinny, mentally checked out, poorly groomed and often lame, all of which I had not been educated enough to identify. Their hay was thrown into tires in the dirt and their meals were poor quality and often forgotten. In warm 60 degree winters they wore blankets for

days on end. Medication was limited due to cost and horses unfit for strenuous work were put down. It was rumored that horses had died on rides, collapsed on the pavement with a rider on their back.

The cruelty of that world broke me in many ways but I believe my experience is just one of many. Often people believe that those who own horses come from immeasurable wealth. The uneducated assumption is that if you can afford to own a horse you can afford to pay for their care. When one goes on a trail ride they don't consider the cost of that ride to the life of a horse. They likely don't consider the cost of a meal or medication. They also may fail to recognize the importance of well educated staff members and guides. But across the world equines remain a significant part of our lives and the quality of their care dependent on privilege, education and wealth.



At Blue Rider Stables our equines receive the life they deserve. Without donations and fundraising Blue Rider truly could not provide such quality care to our animals. The amount of staff and volunteers that help run this program is immense and ever growing thanks to the strong level headed leadership of Christine, Becky and Caitlin. Working here I feel that I can do my job with faith in my employer that the decisions being made truly benefit both the horse and the client.

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

Paul and Alexcia Adams	Danielle Alderman	Richard Allen	Dawn Allen	Katherine Anderson
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Linda Hotchkiss	Mark Hurwitz & Jodi Dinkes	Kimberly Hyatt	Janice Hylton	I.A.Ventures
Jennie & David Jadow	Susan Johnson	Julia Kadison	Paula Kadison	Barbara Kalish



The Great Barrington wildfire this Fall was an anxiety raising event for us, the first we have experienced. The fire stayed on the other side of the mountain from us, and we were never in danger. We closely monitored the horses and the air quality which stayed moderate. We were glad that we did not have to put any evacuation plans into play, and that we could go on with business as usual. We feel for the people out west, where it is a whole different story!

Farewell Freyja

Freyja moved to her retirement home October 10. She had been with us for a few years now, but struggled with her hips and back, and with the large herd. She loved to have a job, but riding wasn't comfortable for her any more. Our dear friend and animal communicator Dawn had been looking for a friend for her mare Mocha, and had a great connection to Freyja - so this seemed to be a perfect solution. She has acclimated really well at Dawn's, and we know where she is and that she is living her best life. We get many updates, and are welcome to visit her any time. What a great way to retire!



Hello Tinni and Isi

We brought two new Icelandics into the herd at the end of the year that we are leasing from their owner who has had to work abroad and entrusted them to us. They are Vísir frá Dallandi, 15, and Tindur frá Goðhamr, 13. They both look very similar, and it will take a bit of time for us to know their temperaments and abilities. The herd is very excited to have some new friends. They will be called Tinni and Isi, since apparently Icelandic names are hard to say. They are already well liked by all.



We thank our local businesses for their support

Agway	Applebees	Baba Louie's	Back to Heart
Barrington Outfitter	Bella Flora	Ben's Dotters Pet Stort	Berkshire Bike & Board
Berkshire Aviation	Berkshire Baby	Berkshire Bass	Berkshire South
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Green Branch Urban	Gt. Barrington Bagel Co	Gt. Barrington Pizza House	Guido's
Jake's Barber Shop	Mama Los	Matrushka	Moms Cafe
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Rubiner's	SoCo Creamery	Tom's Toys	Southern Berkshire Power Equipment
Spirit Shoppe	The East	The Marketplace	
Wards Nursery	Wash 'n' Wag	Wldflowers	

Thank you Blue Rider Stables

After losing my Icelandics in a barn fire in 2015 I never thought I'd ride again, never mind an Icelandic. Fast forward to heavily pregnant in 2020 and a friend recommended I at least stop by Blue Rider to meet Christine. Tears in my eyes seeing the Icelandics, I committed right then and there to my unborn daughter learning to ride at Blue Rider.

Audrey started very young. The first time was a ride with me sitting behind her, my first time back on an Icelandic and I left there balling my eyes out. She started lessons' but started being inconsistent about her desire to ride. I was so worried about her place at Blue Rider that I stepped in to take over her lesson time. My first lesson I left crying; so overwhelmed with the heartache and joy about being back on an Icelandic.

It was then that I reached out to a friend of mine and said- I'm starting from the beginning but I'm coming to the Mongol Derby and I'm going to race in 5 years. That was 2 years ago. I'm certainly not ready to do a 1000km race, and maybe I never will be but I am going to Mongolia. I will ride the wild horses there. And because of Christine and Becky I found my love and my joy of horses again. Don't get me wrong. It's been two years of walking with the occasional tolt. But I ride in the morning on Fridays, my daughter in the afternoon, and at 4 years old she is now pretty consistent in attending her lessons and her love for horses. I've grown as a rider further in 2 years than I had in many years owning my own horses, training for the wrong reasons, and being around horses.

Christine has saved my heart, she has taught me, finally, what the real art of being an equestrian is. She has reassured me that my commitment to the idea that being a "rider" isn't getting on a horse and riding, but that true equestrianism is the relationship between you and the horses you ride which I was always told was wrong. As I am an incredibly impatient person, she has taught me that patience, introspection, and thoughtfulness is worth more than rushing to an outcome. To be fair, the reason I am still walking is because it is such an intellectual challenge to focus on micro movements within my body rather than rushing to a "finish line".

I am forever grateful to Christine for helping me find my love again (though I am still crying while writing this)

Caitlin Marsden McNeill

Will is a severely autistic man in his 30s. He moved to The Berkshires in 2015 and soon after, started riding at Blue Rider Stables. We had tried to get him into a riding program at a much younger age, but he couldn't even allow a helmet on his head without a serious tantrum (so we, unwisely, gave up).

He now has lessons at Blue Rider twice a week, and although he is non-verbal, I sense that these are the highlights of his week. He often chooses to wear his Blue Rider T shirts on days when he'll be riding, and seems genuinely thrilled on the drive to Egremont.

He has made huge progress, and can now ride without assistance, even trotting, and loves to lead the lesson.

He also participates in the annual circus, and has attended Horses After Dark. His ability to wait his turn, follow instructions, and stay focused is amazing to see.

The instructors are all so understanding and supportive of Will, always thinking of new ways to help him improve even more.

After his lessons, he is calm and happy, and I know he feels great sense of pride in his accomplishment on horseback. *Amanda, mother of Will*



Caitlin von Graf

We thank our many donors - the list goes on

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Deirdre Ypma				

I have been riding at Blue Rider Stables for two and a half years. I'm an active, body-aware 74-year-old psychotherapist. I came to Blue Rider because, having had several unpleasant incidents horseback riding in the past, I wanted a chance to restore some of my childhood joy in the riding experience. Christine and Becky and the terrific staff working with them have given me a new delight in riding, but much more as well. They have taught me new things about my own body and mind, and they have gently and empathically supported me through some rough life events that occurred while I was working with them. I am consistently impressed by their ongoing work with other riders, who encompass a wide range of abilities, skills, and needs. Their programs for young people are also impressive. I have found myself integrating their deep wisdom into my work with my own therapy clients and the psychotherapists I teach and supervise. Everyone who works and rides at the stable, including each of the horses and donkeys, contributes to and is enriched by what Blue Rider offers to anyone who enters their doors. Diane



Equine Affaire

We went to the Equine Affaire in Springfield, MA from November 7 - 10, bringing our helper program and interns with us. Everyone learned a lot, and it shows in the weekly lessons this group takes.

One of our students shared this;

Attending the Equine Affaire was one of the best experiences I've ever had. It was so much more than just watching horses; it was a chance to learn about their abilities, see amazing performances, and discover some important life lessons along the way. The whole event was a journey of discovery for me, and I walked away with a deeper understanding and admiration for horses, along with some unforgettable memories. Beyond the performances and demonstrations, the Equine Affaire taught me some important life lessons. I learned that horsemanship is not just about techniques and tricks; it's about patience, understanding, and respect. The trainers and riders at the event spoke a lot about the importance of listening to horses, paying attention to their needs, and building a strong bond with them. These lessons aren't just important for working with horses they can be applied to many aspects of life. It reminded me that in any relationship, communication and respect are key, and that sometimes you need to take the time to understand and listen to others. In conclusion, the Equine Affaire was an experience I will never forget. It opened my eyes to the amazing abilities of horses, and it taught me a lot about hard work, trust, and the deep connection that can exist between humans and animals. From Guy McLean's incredible performance to the beauty of Fantasia and the skill of the drill teams, I learned so much. It wasn't just about horses; it was about learning valuable lessons that I can carry with me in life. The Equine Affaire showed me that there's so much more to horses than I ever realized, and it deepened my respect and admiration for these incredible animals. Thank you again, Blue Rider, for making this unforgettable experience possible. LM



Thank you volunteers

**Avery Ball * Michael Daddona * Caitlin von Graf
Russ Malin * Amanda Sierau * Gretchen Ball
Kristin Daigle * Paul Sierau * Sonia Pauley Gulati
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Buildings and Grounds

Buildings and Maintenance work gets dictated for a big part by the weather. There are always the small ongoing jobs of keeping everything safe and functional, and maintaining the property with weekly chores. The big ones all rely on or are because of weather. In 2024 we had a terrific hay season - great hay quality and we had all of our hay in by June 20, the earliest we have ever been done. The wet weather that let the hay grow didn't let us spread our manure, so we did that in the fall, over 50 loads onto the fields, not a crumb of manure left in the bins! Without our good friend Ted Vining, hay and manure would be a much bigger problem. The totally dry weather of the fall didn't do our pastures any good though, with grass not growing well the pastures took a bit of a beating. The horses stayed happy and out until November anyways.

Burning season was good last year, we got most of the brush and invasives out and burned that we weren't able to get to in 2023.



The new maintenance shed was stocked with shelves and sliding doors to store all equipment

needed for fencing and grounds. The "bus stop" shed finally left after 20 years, another temporary solution that served us well. Thanks to TripleJ Recycling for providing a free dumpster for the removal.

We were able to powerwash the barn interior and the hay shed exterior. We painted the riding ring side of the barn, and fixed the temporary plywood at the top. Nothing lasts as long as a temporary solution! When funding is available, the light band should be replaced, put in in 1995 with a five year life expectancy. Pavers were put down at the barn feed site to alleviate the mud. Hopefully this year we can find the funding to put them at all of the gate sites for better access to the pastures.

Ongoing pasture rotation and mowing keeps the pastures in order. This means putting up and taking down, as well as maintain-

ing, miles and miles of fence line. Sophia has been a great help doing fence line maintenance by diligently weed whacking.

It's nice to see people come for events like Horses after Dark and the pasture walk, where they can really have time to appreciate the barn and the surroundings as well as the horses and staff. *Tom Sierau, Buildings and Grounds Manager*



This year we look forward to these dates and events and hope you will join us:

February Break Program - February 17 - 21

Blue Rider Annual Meeting - April 9

Spring Scavenger Hunt - April 19

April Break Program - April 21 - 25

Circus - "Serendipity" - May 31

Blue Rider Benefit - June 14



Summer Horsemanship Program

June 16 - August 22

Fun Day Fundraiser - August 30

Wings For Willie - October 1 - 31

Pasture Stroll - TBD

Equine Affaire November 6 - 9

Holiday Stroll - December 13

Horses after Dark TBD

