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The Riding Centre: Special Needs Ministry on Horseback

CEDARVILLE, OHIO -- Cedarville University students who have volunteered at the [Riding Centre](#), a nonprofit equestrian organization for special needs children and adults in Yellow Springs, Ohio, have been forced to rein in their involvement this year due to COVID-19. But this spring offers the hope of fresh opportunities to get back in the saddle and serve.

Cedarville students were able to serve for about a month during the 2020 fall semester, from August to September.

“This was way more volunteering than we thought would actually happen in this era of COVID-19,” said Sarah Schweppe, a junior international studies major who got involved with the Riding Centre her sophomore year. “Now more than ever, sharing God’s love with others is so important.”

With spring not far away, Cedarville students are already preparing for warmer days when they can hit the trails with their Riding Centre friends. They will wear masks as they interact with riders and maintain social distance throughout the experience.

When they volunteer, a group of students drive together to the centre, praying for the riders with special needs, for the riders’ families, for other volunteers and organization members helping and assisting in the therapy session on their way. When they arrive, students who are familiar with horses and have been trained to handle them well lead riders on foot, sometimes on trails through downtown Yellow Springs.

“The riders we lead cover a whole range of different ages and disabilities,” said Schweppe. “We make sure they remain safe and confident during each exercise we help them perform. We often quiz the students so they can practice mental recall and help them understand that the horse they are riding is a living creature, one that needs love, patience and encouragement.”

Schweppe shared a story of a lady who was mute and came as a student to the centre. “One of her favorite American Sign Language signs was ice cream,” Schweppe said. “I repeated this sign to her and she got so excited. The joy on her face was amazing. This reminded me of the gift of being able to communicate as those created in God’s image and that each of these people with special needs have so much love and grace to extend to us. There is so much we can learn from them.”

Located in southwest Ohio, Cedarville University is an accredited, Christ-centered, Baptist institution with an enrollment of 4,550 undergraduate, graduate and online students in more than 150 areas of study. Founded in 1887, Cedarville is one of the largest private universities in Ohio, recognized nationally for its authentic Christian community, rigorous academic programs, including the [International Studies](#) program, strong graduation and retention rates, accredited

professional and health science offerings and high student engagement ranking. For more information about the University, visit www.cedarville.edu.

By Brianna Coffey