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PARTNERSHIP ALLOWS FOUNDATION TO PROVIDE EQUINE THERAPY

Children, teens in grief benefit from life lessons taught on Manatee County horse farm

Bradenton, Florida: The Mark Wandall Foundation has partnered with the Sarasota Manatee Association for Riding Therapy (SMART) to provide a unique program for children and teens in grief.

SMART's Equine Assisted Learning program focuses on allowing the children and teens to build leadership, social and relationship skills based on empathy, respect and compassion on a 23-acre farm with a variety of horses. Participants in the program have met once a month since December for two-hour sessions that feature multiple stations.

At SMART, children and teens are guided through a variety of activities, including grooming the horses, working together to build obstacle courses, leading the horses through them and cleaning up after the horses.

The children and teens also have access to the farm's therapy garden, where they can plant seedlings and take them home.

The partnership with SMART allows the families that the foundation serves to build relationships with the horses – and each other – and provide them the opportunity to learn and grow in an unconventional way.

"These children and teens have experienced a loss that forever changes them," said Melissa Wandall, director of The Mark Wandall Foundation. "Life can suddenly be extremely isolating and hard to navigate. Partnering with SMART has allowed us another way to give these kiddos a chance to learn new coping skills and make new connections. They work together, they laugh together, they learn together. It has been a fantastic opportunity, and we're so grateful to work with SMART to serve these families."

For more information or to sign up for the program, email Wendy Orlando at wendy@themarkwandallfoundation.org.

About the organization: The Mark Wandall Foundation is a non-profit, 501(c)(3) organization supporting children and teens who are in grief due to the loss of an immediate family member or guardian. Our establishment facilitates programs that connect these children and their families to the valuable resources they urgently need. Our goal is to assist our children as they unearth their inner courage to confront the personal adversities they are facing and empower them to not only survive in life but to thrive in life. For more information, visit www.themarkwandallfoundation.org.

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