



Andrew proudly wears his gold ribbon close to his heart, which represents childhood cancer awareness. Andrew's little sister, Caroline, fought and conquered stage four cancer with the love and support of her family and favorite horses on the farm.

# Therapy for the Soul

Angel Heart Farm provides hope through equine-assisted therapy to children battling chronic and life-threatening illnesses

Story by Cara Moore

Photos provided by Angel Heart Farm

**T**hree words are at the forefront of everything that Angel Heart Farm stands for — love, healing, and hope.

Each year, more than 15,000 children are diagnosed with cancer and other life-threatening illnesses in the United States. Although treatment is both physically and emotionally demanding, these children are often eager to live as if nothing has changed. The road to recovery may be long, but when these youth are armed with a positive mindset and a strong support system, many can do outstanding things while in treatment.

Angel Heart Farm's equine-assisted therapy program located in College Grove provides a place of solace for children battling chronic or life-threatening illnesses. The non-profit organization allows children to develop a unique bond with an equine companion while empowering them to become caregivers instead of care recipients.

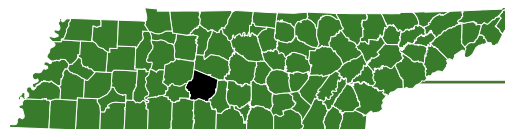
Tracy Kujawa, founder and executive director of the organization, understands these emotions as she has experienced the news of an unwelcome diagnosis herself. As a four-time cancer survivor, Kujawa can connect to patients and families through shared experiences, while also serving as a stark reminder that healing is possible.

Kujawa's dream for the program began in 1998 during her first battle with cancer. She says that her horse, Khuryia, who is still a beloved member of the farm, was a source of comfort as she persevered through chemotherapy treatments, the forfeiture of her career in the music industry, and the loss of both of her parents.

Having experienced the healing power of horses, she founded Angel Heart Farm in 2000 out of the desire to share this unconventional source of hope with children battling similar illnesses.

"When I started the farm, I realized what my true calling was — to serve others," says Kujawa. "I like to say that here





at the farm, we work hard, play hard, and pray hard.”

The heart and soul of the program are the horses who turn therapy into a special activity where the worries of the hospital room melt away. The six Arabians and five ponies that call the property their home have been fondly dubbed “The Angel Crew” due to their gentle spirits and unique healing ability.

Buddy, the smallest pony on the farm, makes frequent on-site visits to hospitals, libraries, children’s groups, senior centers, and other events to raise awareness for childhood cancer. Due to the farm’s partnership with the Nashville Predators, Buddy can often be found making special appearances at Bridgestone Arena in Nashville for the Predator’s Cancer Fight Nights.

Kujawa says that working with The Angel Crew gives children an escape from reality — a place where they can experience the peace of developing a bond with an animal that loves unconditionally no matter the state of their health. Children who visit the farm participate in hands-on activities such as brushing, feeding, and riding, as well as competing in local and regional shows. These activities build trust, confidence, and teach children valuable lessons in sportsmanship, patience, and responsibility.

“The first day a child visits the farm, we set a goal, whether it be going on a trail ride, competing in a show, or simply learning to braid their pony’s mane,” says Kujawa. “Two of our

kids won national championships at the Welsh Pony Nationals, but every child has their own goal, and we make sure that they achieve it.”

The program is 100 percent free for the children to participate, and they are encouraged to continue riding even after remission. As family schedules and routines get turned upside down, Tracy says that it is important to remember that the whole family suffers in these situations as well. For this reason, siblings of the children are allowed to ride at no cost, because they often struggle emotionally with what their family is going through.

“Our barn is a place of solace for these families, and we are here 24 hours a day, seven days a week,” says Kujawa. “I’ve had kids stop by late in the evening after their chemotherapy treatment just because they wanted to pet their pony, and we welcome this kind of interaction.”

Angel Heart Farm also hosts on-the-farm activities for the children’s parents and/or caretakers so that they can build relationships and a support system. Entertainment often includes eating together, sitting around the campfire, relaxing with a session of yoga or meditation, or participating in art and music therapy. Out-of-state families are also welcomed to stay in the farmhouse, located on the farm, at no cost while traveling through town for doctor’s appointments.

“It’s really special to see the connection that these families have with each other, where they can cry together and laugh together,” says Kujawa. “Our moms often say



Angel Heart Farm’s sign is a reminder of what the farm is all about — healing, heart, and horses! The farm is located in College Grove, Tenn.

that they feel a sense of community here on the farm. Although it’s not a club that you want to be in, it’s still a great club.”

Angel Heart Farm is a devoted customer of the Franklin location of United Home and Farm Cooperative and is appreciative of local farmers and community members who are willing to support the program by supplying hay or donating time to assist in maintenance tasks. To learn more about Angel Heart Farm or to make a donation, visit [www.angelheartfarm.com](http://www.angelheartfarm.com).



LEFT: Angel Heart Farm’s pony barn is filled with four Welsh ponies and Buddy the mini horse. RIGHT: Molly, a four year old stage four neuroblastoma cancer survivor loves riding and caring for Katarina. This special pony was named Welsh Pony of the Year and has won a multitude of titles in the show arena, but her favorite title is as best friend to her little warrior riders.