



MT. VERNON

COMMUNITY SCHOOL CORPORATION

"Engage, Educate, and Empower Today's Students"

GIFTS, GRANTS, AND DONATIONS APPROVAL FORM

Reference Policy F275

Instructions: Please complete the following form and submit it to the Business Office for review and approval.

Donor Information

- Full Name/Organization Name: **Harnessing Hope**
- Contact Person (if applicable): Jennifer Wright
- Address:
- City, State, ZIP Code:
- Phone Number: 317-937-4603
- Email Address: harnessinghopeequine@gmail.com

Donation Details

- Type of Donation: **Grant**
- Description of Donation: **Grant through the Weil Foundation**
- Estimated Value **\$3,600**
- Date of Donation: **08/01/2025**
- Purpose/Intended Use of Donation: **The grant offers equine assisted learning opportunities to students from at least 3 academic classes in a one-time visit format. These classes help students with the power of horses to support co-regulate, develop interpersonal skills and improve mental health outcomes.**

 Please click here if the donor wishes to remain anonymous.

 Please check here if the donor will be in attendance at the board meeting for which their donation will be accepted.

Recipient's Name: Dana Hilgert, Teacher

School's Name: Mt. Vernon High School

For Office Use Only

Received By: _____

Date Received: _____

School Board Approved Date: _____

August 1, 2025

Mount Vernon High School
8112 N 200 W
Fortville, IN 46040



Dear Dana Hilgert,

Congratulations!! You've been awarded a grant through the Weil Foundation administered by Harnessing Hope in the sum of \$3,600 to be utilized specifically for Harnessing Hope mobile visits at Mt. Vernon High School. This grant will offer equine assisted learning opportunities to your students from at least 3 academic classes in a one-time visit format.

There is additional funding available through this grant to support multiple or ongoing visits to MVHS by Harnessing Hope. Please let us know at your earliest convenience if these additional sessions may fit into your curriculum.

Best,
Jennifer Wright
President
Harnessing Hope Inc.
harnessinghopeequine@gmail.com
www.harnessinghopeequine.com

Proposal for Funding: Equine-Assisted Learning for Youth of Hancock County

Submitted to: The Weil Foundation

Submitted by: Harnessing Hope Inc

Date: July 14th, 2025



Executive Summary

Harnessing Hope Inc respectfully requests a grant of **\$25,000** from the **Weil Foundation** to support the delivery and expansion of our **Equine-Assisted Learning (EAL)** program for youth in **Hancock County**. Rooted in the principles of the **polyvagal theory**, our program uses the unique power of horses to support **co-regulation**, develop **interpersonal skills**, and improve **mental health outcomes** in youth experiencing stress, trauma, anxiety, and social-emotional challenges.

This funding will directly support group-based sessions that serve youth referred by schools, community agencies, and mental health providers—many of whom lack access or success with conventional therapeutic models. With this partnership, we aim to provide many youth with free or low-cost programming over this season, on the farm and with mobile programming outreach opportunities, that aligns directly with the Weil Foundation's mission to promote youth mental well-being in Hancock County, Indiana.

Organizational Overview

Harnessing Hope Inc is a mission-driven nonprofit organization that specializes in **equine-assisted learning (EAL)** and **trauma-informed, experiential interventions** for anyone who wants to become a better person through the partnership with an equine, as well as Therapeutic Riding and Driving opportunities. We collaborate with schools, youth-serving programs, and community mental health organizations to deliver structured small group sessions grounded in **neuroscience**, **somatic regulation**, and **relational healing through the power of horses**.

Our facilitators are certified through PATH and trained in **polyvagal-informed approaches through the Poly Vagal Equine Institute (PVEI)**, ensuring that every session is emotionally and physiologically safe for its participants, volunteers, staff, and horses. Since our founding, we continue to see strong, measurable outcomes in emotional regulation, peer interaction, and self-awareness in the clients served.

Statement of Need

Youth in Hancock County are facing rising levels of emotional distress, dysregulation, and social-emotional deficiencies. Teachers, parents, and counselors report an increase in anxiety, depression, and behavioral dysregulation. Traditional therapy settings are not always effective—particularly for youth who struggle with verbal expression or who have experienced relational trauma. Understanding your emotions is addiction prevention and crime prevention in our communities. If young people learn how to recognize and process these feelings when they arise, they will be set up for a successful, more grounded, future and are at less of a risk to self-medicate through addictive behaviors.

Polyvagal theory emphasizes that **co-regulation and embodied safety** are critical to healing. Horses, as non-judgmental, attuned animals, offer a unique opportunity for youth to experience nervous system regulation and connection without words. Horses effortlessly fill this void and ask the participant to come into their calm instead of adding to stress levels. An equine's nervous system is five times larger than our own, naturally overpowering our anxieties and helping regulate our bodies to find balance.

The Harnessing Hope program is uniquely positioned to fill this therapeutic gap in Hancock County, as there are no other programs offered like this available to our community. We have been steadily growing over the last two years, and foresee that to continue, especially with the support to expand more fully into Hancock County.

Program Descriptions

Our concurrent program provides 8-10 weekly 90-minute **group equine-assisted learning sessions** for youth at our therapeutic farm or on a host location with our mobile programming. We work with program partners to develop the polyvagal nerve-based, interpersonal skill building curriculum, which may include topics such as: communication, trust, anger, or leadership. These sessions also may be offered on a one-time visit, or in a longer day camp format. Occasionally, it is identified by a partner organization that a student should receive services individually or with a caregiver in more critical situations. Additionally, we offer snacks and water at the barn, available at any time. Listening to our bodily cues and attending to them right away lets us build trust and safety with our polyvagal system, therefore more likely to step outside our comfort zones into growth.

Each session is co-facilitated by a certified professional and includes:

- Structured interaction with horses (generally non-riding)
- Polyvagal-informed somatic exercises

- Group discussions and skill-building activities
- Observational learning through herd dynamics

Key Themes:

- Co-regulation & emotional safety
- Empathy & non-verbal communication
- Trust-building & boundaries
- Social engagement & collaboration

Ideally, each cohort runs weekly for 8-10 **weeks of concurrent sessions**. Groups are composed of up to 12 participants (not including staff of partner organizations) referred by schools, mental health agencies, or collaborations with youth service providers. However, the timing, length and quantity of sessions can be customized with the partner to better fit into their existing framework.

Alignment with the Weil Foundation

The Weil Foundation's mission to support **youth mental health** aligns directly with our model. Through somatic, experiential learning and trauma-sensitive facilitation, this program helps youth **feel safe in their bodies, build healthy relationships, and improve emotional functioning**.

This grant will:

- Expand access to at promise youth in Hancock County
 - Remove financial barriers for families
 - Deepen local understanding of polyvagal-informed care for healthier communities
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Program Goals & Outcomes

Goal: Improve emotional regulation, interpersonal functioning, and resilience among youth through equine-assisted learning.

Objectives:

1. Serve groups or individual youth in Hancock County through EAL sessions.
 2. Demonstrate at least **80%** participant improvement in one or more regulation, social, or emotional domains.
 3. Increase trauma-informed capacity in partner schools and youth programs.
 4. Integrate polyvagal principles into all session planning and facilitation.
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Program Partners

Working in collaboration with the Community Foundation of Hancock County, we have identified program partners that serve the population of youth selected for this type of services by the end of our 2025 programming season. Groups such as:

- Girl Scouts of Hancock County
- Eastern Hancock Schools
- Mount Vernon Schools
- Greenfield School Corporation
- Celebrate Recovery- Brandywine Church
- Royal Family Kids- Foster child support and mentoring
- Hancock County Youth Assistance Program (HYAP)
- Boys and Girls Club of Hancock County

Budget Summary

<u>Program Type</u>	<u>Amount (\$)</u>
1 Equine Assisted Learning (EAL) Visit	\$1,000 Per visit
1-12 participants for 90 minutes- typically including:	

- 1-2 dedicated PATH instructors
- 1-9 Therapeutic equines
- 1-12 trained volunteers
- Programming Supplies, snacks and water

Day Camp Day Experience

\$850 per camper

5 hours - typically including:

- 1-2 dedicated PATH instructors
- 1-9 Therapeutic equines
- 1-12 trained volunteers
- Programming Supplies, one meal, snacks and water



On-site Equine Assisted Learning (EAL) Session

\$1,500 per visit



Each Equine Assisted Learning (EAL) Session-

120 minutes- typically including:

- 2 dedicated PATH instructors
- 1-9 Therapeutic equines
- 1-12 trained volunteers
- Programming Supplies, snacks and water

- ***These visits can have varied formats and reach up to ~300 participants for large group settings/whole school visits.**

Individualized Program Scholarship

\$400.00 Per private session

60 minutes- typically including:

- 1 dedicated PATH instructors
- 1-2 Therapeutic equines, care and upkeep
- 1-3 trained volunteers
- Programming Supplies, snacks and water

Total Funding Request

\$25,000

For example: The funding may be utilized by collaborating with two- 8-10 week Hancock County Community program partners and providing a Fall Break Day camp experience.

Evaluation & Sustainability

Evaluation tools include:

- Youth self-assessments (pre/post)
- Staff observation rubrics
- Feedback from referring professionals
- Optional caregiver input

Sustainability will come from a combination of school partnerships, community sponsorships, and additional grant support. This funding from the Weil Foundation is critical to providing equitable access during our 2025 fall programming.

Conclusion

Harnessing Hope's equine-assisted model addresses the root of trauma and dysregulation by fostering **real-time, embodied experiences of safety and connection**. With support from the Weil Foundation, we can reach more youth during this fall semester who need this type of intervention—and build a stronger, more resilient Hancock County.

Contact Information

Jennifer Wright

President and Instructor— Harnessing Hope Inc

HarnessingHopeEquine@gmail.com

317-937-4603

www.HarnessingHopeEquine.com

Sample Session Plan: Polyvagal-Informed Equine-Assisted Learning

Session Title: Grounding Through the Herd

Duration: 90 minutes

Facilitators: 2- PATH Certified Instructors
Target Group: Ages 12–16 (6-12 participants)

Objectives:

- Support co-regulation through interaction with horses
 - Increase nervous system awareness using polyvagal-informed language
 - Practice healthy boundaries and non-verbal communication
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Session Outline:

Time	Activity	Notes
0–10 mins	Arrival & Grounding	Breathwork, sensory check-in, intro to “color zones” of the nervous system (blue = shut down, red = fight/flight, green = safe/connected).
10–30 mins	Herd Observation	Quiet time observing horse behavior. Youth prompted to notice cues of calm, alertness, and connection.
30–50 mins	Relational Activity – “Lead the Way”	Youth in pairs lead horses through a gentle course. Focus on pacing, boundaries, attunement. Facilitators guide co-regulation strategies (breathing, posture, pace).
50–70 mins	Reflection Circle	What nervous system state were you in? What helped you shift toward “green”? What did you notice in the horse? Others?
70–90 mins	Closing Ritual	Gratitude circle, co-created calming routine (e.g., brushing horses, breathing together), and goodbye to the herd.

Materials Needed:

- Horse-safe grooming tools
- Cones or boundary markers

- Nervous system visuals/zone chart
- Journals or drawing supplies (optional)

Evaluation

Title: Harnessing Hope Youth Evaluation – Pre/Post Assessment

For Use With: Youth participants

Method: Self-rating + staff observation

Frequency: Before and after each program series of sessions

Part 1: Youth Self-Assessment

(Rate each from 1 = Not at all true to 5 = Very true)

1. I can calm down when I feel upset.
 2. I feel safe when I'm around other people.
 3. I can tell when my body feels tense or relaxed.
 4. I enjoy working in groups or with a partner.
 5. I can notice when I need a break or time to breathe.
 6. I know how to help myself feel more calm.
 7. I trust others more than I used to.
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Part 2: Facilitator Observation Rubric

Skill/Indicator	Emerging (1)	Developing (2)	Practicing (3)	Consistent (4)
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Emotional Regulation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Verbal Engagement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Non-Verbal Attunement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Peer Interaction	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ability to Co-Regulate	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>