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The EQUUS Foundation Mentor accreditation is awarded annually to Guardian charities that have met the highest standards for business and welfare practices. Endeavor Therapeutic Horsemanship Inc. in Mt. Kisco, N.Y., is one such organization.

© Courtesy Of Endeavor Therapeutic Horsemanship Inc.

EQUUS Foundation leaders hope the study's analysis will serve to provide evidence-based guidance to increase the sustainability of these critical non-profits.

Organizations that receive the EQUUS Foundation's Guardian status must meet strict criteria in both equine welfare and business practices. To receive and maintain recognition, organizations must annually submit extensive documentation on everything from volunteer contributions to board structure to financial management to aftercare policies; this new study is the result of a comprehensive analysis of this verified data.

"This is showing what these charities are actually doing on an everyday basis to care for their horses, what their policies are, and what is happening to the horses when no longer under their care," says Lynn Coakley, EQUUS Foundation president. "It's a

snapshot of how they are functioning, and now that we have the system in place [to perform this analysis], we'll be able to see trends moving forward."

This year's work is an expansion of initial data analysis completed two years ago by EQUUS Foundation Chief Operating Officer Dr. Karin Bump. Her work revealed that the collected data warranted further specialized attention to better identify key performance indicators, highlight similarities and differences between organization types, and uncover opportunities to better support their charitable work.

"It's a wealth of data," says Bump. "Ultimately, this report is another educational tool, giving us a better understanding and awareness of those variables. The work is about, 'How can we continue to help these organizations be sustainable?' knowing how critical they are in protecting America's horses.

Below: Central Kentucky Riding For Hope, based in Lexington, Ky., is another organization that holds the EQUUS Foundation Mentor accreditation.

'A RESPONSIBILITY TO HELP ALL THE HORSES'

A new EQUUS Foundation study spotlights the habits of healthy charities.

By Christina Keim

The EQUUS Foundation, a non-profit dedicated to providing accreditation and financial support to equine charities, recently released an inaugural study synthesizing data collected from the 128 groups it awarded Guar-

dian status in 2025. The 78-page report highlights organizational procedures, policies, and financial commitments of these groups, drawn from verified

data. Further, it allows for comparison between charities providing equine-assisted services, such as therapeutic riding, and those offering equine transition services, such as rescues and sanctuaries.

© Courtesy Of Central Kentucky Riding For Hope



“My hope is to partner with some of our university colleagues, to be able to do breakout reports,” she continues. “The opportunity to understand so many details of what is happening [within these organizations] is so important.”

A few significant takeaways from the results of this inaugural analysis include the quantification of volunteer impact on equine charitable organizations of all types, budgetary differences between EAS and ETS groups, and identification of the available capacity for ETS organizations.

Nineteen percent of the Guardian charities operate entirely on a volunteer basis; 27 of them rely wholly on volunteers for the daily care of their animals. These results underscore the critical importance of effective volunteer recruitment and retention strategies.

“If you took volunteers away and calculate what that means in terms of what it would cost to replace that—it’s mind boggling,” says Bump. “You know volunteers are critically important, but the reality of that when you put pen to paper is astonishing.”

The analysis further revealed a clear distinction in financial profiles between EAS and ETS organizations, with the latter being more likely to operate with smaller budgets. EQUUS Foundation leadership applauds the transparency their Guardian charities display in disclosure of their financial practices, with 83 percent filing a full IRS Form 990 annually.

Below: High Hopes Therapeutic Riding in Old Lyme, Conn., is an EQUUS Foundation Mentor-accredited nonprofit.

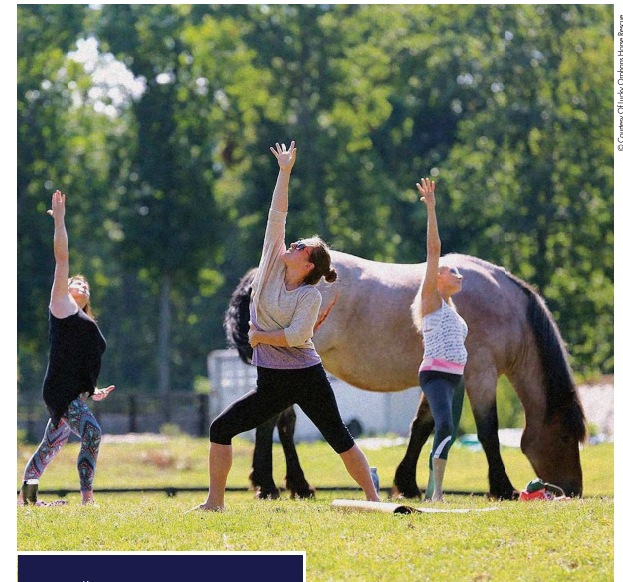
Horse care and maintenance represent a significant budgetary line item, regardless of charity type, with hay, followed by veterinary services, comprising over one quarter of their equine-related expenses. And although 81 percent of Guardians received donations of goods and services during the reporting period, those donations did not provide a significant reduction in the cost of equine care.

Another unique metric evaluated by this study is a detailed equine census across organizations. Data collected includes specifics beyond just the total number of animals; charities reported each animal’s name, breed, age, gender, number of days under care, and adoption rates (if ETS). Organizational capacity data were extrapolated through a combination of these collected data points.

“What is encouraging is for ETS, a large percentage are being rehomed in six months or less, or less than a year,” says Coakley. “Because we know how many horses they had under their care on a specific date, and we can track how many horse days they were responsible for and what their capacity is—we know these organizations *do* have capacity to take on more horses. They don’t necessarily have the money, but they have the space.”

For equine charitable organizations, this study provides valuable insights to inform strategic planning and development initiatives, as well as the opportunity to identify their own, unique, key performance indicators—whether they are part of the EQUUS Foundation’s Equine Welfare Network.

“These can be benchmarks that start conversations,” says Bump.



Above: Lucky Orphans Horse Rescue, which holds the EQUUS Foundation Mentor accreditation, is based in Dover Plains, N.Y.

“IF YOU TOOK VOLUNTEERS AWAY AND CALCULATE WHAT THAT MEANS IN TERMS OF WHAT IT WOULD COST TO REPLACE THAT—IT’S MIND BOGGLING.”
—DR. KARIN BUMP

“If donors don’t have confidence, it’s a massive hindrance to the system,” she continues. “If we can say, ‘Here is all this great work that’s being done, you can have confidence in supporting this organization,’ and at the same time, encourage more organizations to have these standards and do this reporting, we lift all of us up, and continue to build that donor and volunteer base.”

EQUUS Foundation staff are welcoming invitations to speak on the results of the report, formally or informally, with boards, supporters, and others who want to further the conversation.

“What we do at the EQUUS Foundation is try to help organizations be as strong as they can, to be the best they can, to give horses a place to land,” says Bump. “If we are passionate about horses and the horse population, we have a responsibility to help all the horses, not just our own.” ■

Further, its authors hope the report will increase donor confidence in the security and ability of participating organizations to ethically use donated funds in fulfillment of their mission.

“These are organizations committed to high standards, transparency, and integrity—and of course, that’s all about the best care of the horse,” says Bump. “The more we can provide donors a place they can go to find charities that they want to support, where they feel their dollars are going to go to good use and that the organization is going to be around for the future, the more we can support those doing this work.”

