A NARRATIVE INQUIRY OF VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCES
AT A MIDWESTERN EQUESTRIAN FACILITY
FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

A thesis submitted to the
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of Education, Health, and Human Services
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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by

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“Volunteers are the heartbeat of our organization,” remarked the director of Helping Hooves (HH). This Non Profit Organization, like others, realizes the impact that volunteers make on the services they are able to provide for their clients. The purpose of this study was to explore participants’ perceptions of benefits derived from volunteering, personal characteristics, motivations for volunteering, pathways to volunteering, and impact and interactions within the client/volunteer/staff community. A qualitative narrative inquiry approach was used at a Non-Profit Organization (NPO) that provides equine-assisted therapy for its clients. The 22 participants in this study ranged from 14 to 82 years of age and had volunteered at the NPO from 9 months to 15 years. Five of the volunteers were individuals with disabilities. Data collection consisted of observations and impressions made by the researcher as a participant, and field note observations and reflections. Field notes were analyzed and participant interviews were transcribed, coded, and analyzed to reveal themes. The findings of this research addressed the volunteers’ pathways to arrival at HH, their self-identified qualities and characteristics, their perceptions of benefits received, their relationships within HH, their sense of community, and their reasons for continued volunteering at Helping Hooves. This thesis has
implications for those NPOs who provide services similar to *Helping Hooves* and others who wish to increase and maintain their volunteer base.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to give my sincerest thanks and appreciation to my thesis advisor, Tricia Niesz. Without her guidance, support, and constructive feedback, this work would not have seen the light of day. Tricia introduced me to qualitative research, and the rest is history.

I extend thanks to members of my thesis committee, Andrea Adolph and Rafa Kasim, who, to use my metaphor for volunteering, “gave of their time” to see my thesis to its conclusion.

I sincerely thank my friend of many decades, Pam, who didn’t erase me from “speed dial” when I dropped off the face of the earth to write.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

As I walk up the path to *Helping Hooves*, an equestrian facility for disabled individuals, a cold October wind is kicking up and dark grey clouds look like snow would soon be falling. White fencing encloses the four large paddocks that flank the 300-foot drive. A female Boxer, one of the many resident barn dogs, sits on the porch next to the front door and smells my hand as I approach. I enter the large pine-paneled gathering room with its walls covered with posters, pictures, and paintings of horses. Picnic tables are decorated with pumpkins and small bowls of candy corn. Two barn cats roam the space jumping up on counters as if they own it. I later discover they do. One long wall looks to be of gray-colored glass, approximately 15 feet by 6 feet, but it is a two-way mirror so visitors or parents can view their children riding in the arena. Lined up in front of the window are several wooden captain’s chairs for the comfort of the parents and riders; a mother and small child are sitting, watching and pointing. I introduce myself to a staff member and tell her that I am conducting volunteer interviews to determine what they like about working here and what overall benefits they receive for doing so. I ask for the volunteer coordinator but am told she is not in. “Oh, then, you’ll want to talk to Kevin,” the staff member replies.

Kevin is just coming through the door from the stable area. He is wearing a tan barn coat, riding boots, and a shiny black riding helmet. The staff member waives to Kevin and tells me that he was in the newspapers recently in regard to his work at the
facility and that he probably wouldn’t mind talking to me. I guess Kevin to be about 17 years old, but as we talk, I discover he is 27. At one point in our conversation I ask him, “So tell me, who is Kevin?” He stops for what I think is an uncomfortably long time, then answers, “Ummmm, I have a disability, so I come out here and ride.” Kevin is not only a volunteer; he is one of the riders.

Who is a volunteer? Can we match a face with the word? Is there a volunteer profile? How do they see themselves? Maybe it all depends on who you ask. According to the United States Department of Labor, volunteers are defined as, “persons who did unpaid work (except for expenses) through or for an organization” (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2004). A snapshot of a volunteer from data collected by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) in a report dated September 1, 2003, through September 2004 suggested a white female volunteer who works part-time, is between the ages of 35 and 44, is a college graduate, is married with a spouse present, and has children under the age of 18.

Lukka and Ellis (2001) suggested that if you presented this question to the average Jane or Joe on the street, they might say, “a middle-class lady with her twinset [sweater] and pearls caring for the needy” (p. 2). The view might be a generic one, such as an individual who puts himself or herself at the disposal of the community (Paolicchi, 1995), or “people who actively involve themselves in doing good for others and for society, individuals and communities” (Omoto & Snyder, 2002, p. 846), or as Wilson and Musick (1999) commented, “Someone who contributes time to helping others with no expectation of pay or other material benefit to herself” (p. 141). Wilson (2000) suggested that a volunteer gives time freely to benefit another person, group, or cause, whereas
Brown (1999) viewed a volunteer as someone who engages in purposeful activity that is not compelled, and the productive value of which is not captured by the volunteer.

Roberts and Devine (2004) wrote that theories of voluntarism focus on “. . .self motivation, a pre-determined plan, or a formal volunteering infrastructure” (p. 286), and overlook the accidental and arbitrary factors by which individuals come to volunteer; “People become involved by default” (p. 287).

Diversity is at the core of volunteerism at *Helping Hooves*, not only in volunteer demographics but in volunteer motivation.

Kevin does not fit the Bureau of Labor statistics profile (BLS 2004). “People with disabilities are typically viewed as the recipients of volunteer services rather than potential contributors of services” (Phoenix, Miller, & Schleien, 2002, p. 27). These authors suggested a paradigm shift where people with disabilities are given “a new role as givers and contributors to community” (p. 27). A study by Roker, Player, and Coleman (1998) revealed that disabled young adults experience an increase in self-confidence in which they feel they can change the world, as well as develop social skills and networks.

Kevin takes the local bus system to *Helping Hooves* since he does not want his parents to transport him anymore. He itemizes his daily routine of checking the message board to see what horses need grooming or taken out to pasture. I ask how long he thought it took to groom one horse. “Ummm, maybe an hour and a half or longer depending how dirty they are from laying in the hay or stall . . . depending if they’re dirty, it takes a little bit longer.” Brill (1994) reported that young individuals with disabilities are constantly on the receiving end of services as the public view them in
need of assistance. “Seldom do they see themselves as competent and capable of giving assistance and making positive changes in the community” (p. 369). Disabled youth make a positive contribution to society, which the public may overlook, particularly when disabled youth, through volunteering, care for others (Roker et al., 1998). The authors called on researchers to discover the best ways to involve youth with disabilities in their communities and to uncover models of “best practice” (p. 727). Narratives of HH youth volunteers within this study provide evidence for their involvement in a community program and the program’s practice that supports the retention of adolescent volunteers.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore the paths by which adults and youth, came to volunteer at HH, their personal characteristics, motivations, perceived benefits derived from volunteering within HH’s organizational context, and their impact and interactions within the community of HH. Five research questions drove this study:

1. What paths did individuals take to arrive at Helping Hooves?

2. What are the personal histories of individuals who volunteer at Helping Hooves?

3. What are the perceived personal benefits of volunteering at Helping Hooves?

4. What interactions exist between volunteers and the Helping Hooves’ community?

5. What are the contributing factors for sustained volunteering at Helping Hooves?
During the spring of 2004 through the spring 2005, and again in late spring 2009, I visited an equestrian facility for the disabled named *Helping Hooves* situated on 120 acres in the Midwest United States. Through participant observations, document analysis, and semi-structured audio-recorded interviews, the five research questions were investigated through Narrative Analysis.

**Rationale**

My interest in studying volunteerism at *Helping Hooves* was based on the lack of literature with a focus on the personal points of view of volunteers regarding their activities. I found self-reported descriptions missing from the general research steeped in motivational strategies. I found numerous quantitative studies in which volunteers were represented by a statistic. The volunteers were not identified by any other means except a number within a category created by the researcher. This statistic, often a percentage, might represent a segment of the identified population whose motivation to volunteer might be driven by loneliness, altruism, or social capital. While reading these studies, I was not able to connect the statistic with the individuals it represented. I was curious to discover who these volunteers were besides their age, gender, and socio-economic status. I wanted to meet the volunteers behind the numbers and hear their stories. By gathering and analyzing the *HH* narratives, I will not only add to the body of literature on this topic, but provide a document which can be referenced by accredited *North American Riding for the Handicapped Association* facilities with the hope of assisting them in maintaining and possibly increasing their volunteer base to better serve their clients.
Summary

My research adds descriptive insights to the literature of volunteerism. The first-hand accounts of adult volunteers, youth volunteers, and youth volunteers with disabilities, are explored as well as parental support/volunteer modeling, and the familial aspect of Helping Hooves. Aside from on-line web sites of various accredited establishments for the North American Riding for the Handicapped Association (NARHA) describing the national programs, I found no literature that provided a qualitative account of a NARHA facility and the volunteer narratives within. This study offers the reader a glimpse into a community of giving, receiving, and healing, and introduces the reader to individuals who, without monetary gain, enable a unique non-profit organization to continue providing equine-assisted therapy for its clients.
CHAPTER II
METHODOLOGY

“Tell me a good story, a story that tells me what really affected you as a volunteer,” I ask Janelle. “Probably the first child I worked with was a 3-year old Down’s [syndrome] girl.” Janelle begins to paint a portrait of the first rider she worked with at Helping Hooves. “I watched her grow and change, and become more focused on what was being done, to the point that it was only her and I.” Janelle reports that the little girl is riding independently now with a bridle and does not need her horse led around the arena by a volunteer. “She’s seven or eight [now], she’s a tiny, beautiful little girl, and that transformation . . . you see this transformation.” Janelle looks upward and her eyes water ever so slightly as she remembers and tells her story of a child’s physical and mental change that occurred as a result of equine assisted therapy.

The reader may have written, listened to, read, or told many stories over the years. A story can transport us to places imagined or concrete, and from each story we extract meaning based on our personal history. The focus of my research was to extract meaning from the narratives of individuals who give of their time and talent to volunteer at HH. The stories of HH may have been anecdotally shared within its stalls and walls, but not explored from a qualitative research perspective using narrative accounts provided by the participants. “Powerful insights offered by stories have often been ignored, perhaps because of the traditional predominance in research of the modernist empirical view” (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 14).
I found no literature in which a volunteer population at an equestrian facility for the disabled has been studied qualitatively to understand the significance of their narrative accounts in regard to their motivation to volunteer, their social interactions, and their personal benefits.

Creswell (2003) provided the reason for my choice of a qualitative research method.

One of the chief reasons for conducting a qualitative study is that the study is exploratory. This means that not much has been written about the topic or the population being studied, and the researcher seeks to listen to participants and build an understanding based on their ideas. (p. 30)

My goal was to “understand social interactions within the setting or social group from the perspective of the participants” (Bailey, 2007, p. 41). I wanted to understand how an HH volunteer felt after working side by side with a child every Saturday for a year and then hearing the child speak his or her first word from the back of a horse. I wanted to understand why HH volunteers considered mucking stalls and sweeping aisleways as a form of relaxation. I wanted to understand how the interactions between volunteers and riders and between volunteers and other volunteers maintained HH as a functioning community organization. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) wrote that qualitative analysis “Is as much about ‘how things are said’ as about what is said” (p. 77). The saying is culturally situated. I am interested in the saying of the stories, and the culture of the volunteer community within HH. In choosing a qualitative approach, issues which the volunteers at HH considered important emerged (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 7).
Narrative Inquiry as a qualitative research method requires me to search for understanding and to make meaning of the volunteer experience at HH (Chase, 2008; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Czarniawska, 2004; Fontana & Frey, 2008; Polkinghorne, 1988). Geertz (1995) called for,

Showing how particular events and unique occasions, an encounter here, a development there, can be woven together with a variety of facts and a battery of interpretations to produce a sense of how things go, have been going, and are likely to go (p. 3).

By examining HH volunteer stories, I was able to visualize the temporality of the volunteer experience: what they had experienced, what they and I were experiencing, and what they might experience.

“The narrative organizational scheme is of particular importance for understanding human activity. It is the scheme that displays purpose and direction in human affairs and makes human individual lives comprehensible as wholes” (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 18). By using volunteer narratives as a qualitative data source, I sought to comprehend volunteer activity at HH and to recognize “the meaningfulness of individual experiences by noting how they function as parts in a whole” (p. 36).

A multidirectional visual by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) reflects my research at HH as a “Three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, with temporality along one dimension, the personal and the social along a second dimension, and a place along a third” (p. 50). Webster and Mertova (2007) wrote that narrative research “. . .does not strive to produce any conclusions of certainty, but aims for its findings to be ‘. . . well
grounded’ and supportable, retaining an emphasis on the linguistic reality of human experience” (p. 4).

Research Context

Site Selection

*Helping Hooves*, established in 1985 situated on 120 acres in a rural Midwestern locale, is a therapeutic equestrian center serving people with disabilities. *HH*, a non-profit organization receiving no government or United Way monies, exists to provide individuals with mental/and or physical disabilities the opportunity to participate in therapeutic equestrian recreational activities designed to meet their specific needs. *HH* facilities include a heated year-round riding arena which has a wooden platform and a wheelchair accessible hydraulic lift to assist with mounting, stalls for 40 horses, dressage and outdoor arenas, an adapted riding course, and 20 acres for trail riding. *HH* is fully accredited by the *North American Riding for the Handicapped Association (NARHA)* which sets safety and quality standards for therapeutic riding nationwide, and all *HH* instructors at the farm are *NARHA* and *Certified Horsemanship Association (CHA)* certified. Riders are accepted as young as four years old.

The mission of *HH* is to maximize the potential of persons with disabilities to become independent, well-rounded, self-confident individuals by providing horseback riding along with recreational and social support. *HH* is committed to the idea that horseback riding has exceptional physical and psychological benefits, challenging riders with disabilities to achieve a control they may not typically experience in day-to-day life.
Horseback riding closely parallels the rhythm of walking, and stimulates parts of the brain which control vocal as well as motor skills.

*HH* averages over 18,000 volunteer hours a year; serving riders whose disabling conditions include, but not limited to, Down Syndrome, spina bifida, mental retardation, autism, cerebral palsy, and severe behavioral disabilities. The director of *HH* commented that “Volunteers are the Heartbeat” of *Helping Hooves*. Volunteers typically assist with barn chores, assisting riders, gardening, office work, or special events depending on their interest.

**Participants**

The twenty-two individuals interviewed for this study ranged in age from 14 years old to 82 with the initial volunteer interview solicited through the facility director. Table 1 lists the pseudonyms, ages, and the role of the participants at *HH*. Adult ages are listed as approximate with the exception of Dotty and Kevin who self-reported their ages. Ages for the youth volunteers are exact as they were self-reported during the interview process.

Participants were located through word of mouth consisting of those who were agreeable to be interviewed and if necessary, with written permission by a parent. A certified Riding Instructor, an Equine Facility Director, a Volunteer Coordinator, and a Barn Manager were also interviewed which allowed me to compare and contrast the narratives of the *HH* volunteers with those of the paid staff.
Table 1

*Helping Hooves Research Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Approx. Age</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Actual Age</th>
<th>Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adults</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Youth</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dotty</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>Master Gardener</td>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Rider/Volunteer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colleen</td>
<td>50s</td>
<td>Facility Director</td>
<td>Billy</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Rider/Volunteer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gabby</td>
<td>60s</td>
<td>Volunteer</td>
<td>Cal</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Volunteer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gayle</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>Volunteer</td>
<td>Carmella</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Volunteer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janelle</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>Volunteer</td>
<td>Emmy</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Volunteer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joyce</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>Barn Manager</td>
<td>Kelly</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Rider/Volunteer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>50s</td>
<td>Volunteer</td>
<td>Lenore</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Volunteer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Rider/Volunteer</td>
<td>Monica</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Rider/Volunteer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pamela</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>Equine Facility Director</td>
<td>Robin</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Volunteer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patrice</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>Volunteer Coordinator</td>
<td>Sandra</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Volunteer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perry</td>
<td>50s</td>
<td>Volunteer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tessa</td>
<td>60s</td>
<td>Riding Instructor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Researcher Role and Ethics

Upon each arrival at *HH* I informed a member of the staff that I was at *HH* either to conduct an interview or to observe. I attended a half-day volunteer orientation to familiarize myself with the training the volunteers received and the duties involved with *HH*. As my research progressed, I became more acquainted with the staff and the
volunteers. *HH* was accepting of my presence, and there was a sense of trust building with each successive visit.

Participants and/or parents were provided with a research packet which included: a letter of introduction and summary of my research, a letter to the parent or guardian if the volunteer was under the age of 18, a document of informed consent, and an audiotape-consent form (Refer to Appendix A). Hatch (2002) wrote,

> We ask a lot when we ask individuals to participate in our qualitative studies. We usually ask for a considerable amount of time, but more important, we ask participants to reveal what goes on behind the scenes of their everyday lives (p. 65).

Since I was asking the participants to share their everyday *HH* stories, at the beginning of each interview I informed the participant of my obligation to keep everything discussed during our conversation confidential and that their actual names would not be used in my final report. I explained the purpose of my research and the benefits their stories would make to the Equine Assisted Therapy community. I assured them that I was interested in their thoughts alone. Any client mentioned during the interview process was also given a pseudonym. If a segment of the conversation was inaudible, I marked it as such in the transcript and did not insert my words to make the segment useable. It was an ethical imperative to protect the feelings and anonymity “. . . of those who have given themselves in any project” (Hatch, 2002, p. 69).
Data Collection

Timeline

I began research in the fall of 2004 and continued through the fall of 2009. On each visit to HH I might interview a participant, assist in volunteer duties, or record my impressions and observations following the suggestion of Hatch (2002) to gather “. . . information in different forms from different sources” (p. 97), to improve the quality of my research.

Strategies

Interviews

Interviews became a major source of data for my research. I audio-recorded each interview and took notes after the interview to locate the participant data in time and place. Czarniawska (2004) wrote, “. . . in many cases, answers given in an interview are spontaneously formed into narratives” (p. 51). Stories told in response to my interview questions were what I was searching for, but as Czarniawska pointed out, “Sometimes another issue, brought spontaneously by the interviewee turns out to be more interesting” (p. 55).

I chose to use a semi-structured interview format in which I had specific questions in mind. Additional questions were generated during the interview which allowed me to pursue a varied line of questioning if the participant presented a topic I had not considered. Each interview was a learning experience for me in the collection of qualitative data, and I became more proficient in asking questions that would provide in-depth responses and improve the quality and amount of data collected. To ensure that my
interview questions would elicit information to answer my research questions, I matched my interview questions to my research questions (Bailey, 2007). “The central issue of method is to bring research questions and data collection into a consistent relationship” (Erickson, 1986, p. 140). To this end, the overarching theme of my interview questions was to have the volunteers tell me how they came to HH, why they stay, and what they “get” out of it (Refer to Appendix B).

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggested that “… the conditions under which the interview takes place also shape the interview; for example, the place, the time of day, and the degree of formality established” (p. 110). Nineteen of the interviews took place on the grounds of HH, where I interviewed volunteers from over, under, behind, and in front of a horse; in the aisleways, paddocks, and arenas. I conducted two interviews at a local café, and two interviews were held in the homes of the participants. Table 2 lists the volunteer interviews by length in minutes and date.

“People follow cultural rules without being aware of them and so find it difficult to explain what for them are taken for granted events” (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). The everyday HH barn narratives were necessary to help me make sense of the whys of volunteer involvement at HH. From one participant to the next, my interview technique became what Clandinin and Connelly (2000) called a “form of conversation” (p. 101). I gave my “respectful and interested attention” (Czarniawska, 2004, p. 48), nurturing the context to be “one of interaction and relation” (Fontana & Frey, 2008, p. 121).
Table 2

*Participant Interview Length and Date*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adults</th>
<th>Interview Length in min.</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Youth</th>
<th>Interview Length in min.</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dotty</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>10/20/2004</td>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>4/5/2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colleen</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10/15/2004</td>
<td>Billy</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4/1/2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gayle</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4/1/2005</td>
<td>Carmella</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>8/31/2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joyce</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>4/2/2005</td>
<td>Kelly</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4/2/2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>10/15/2004</td>
<td>Monica</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>8/19/2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perry</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>4/16/2005</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tessa</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10/15/2004</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hatch (2002) wrote that “... good informants have knowledge about everyday life in the setting being studied and they are willing and able to communicate that knowledge” (p. 98). My participants provided me with a variety of perspectives in response to the same question. Since I was conducting one-shot interviews and attempting “... to capture a number of perspectives on particular topics ... it is essential that each participant has the chance to discuss each topic” (p. 102).
Observations

Aside from interviewing the participants, my secondary purpose was to document what I saw, heard, and experienced. Before or after each interview I found a quiet place in HH where I could sit and watch the activities of the volunteers as they interacted with each other and the clients and record my observations in a journal. These observations would last from 45 minutes to two hours. In addition to the days that I conducted interviews I also visited HH for the sole purpose of observation. These visits lasted from three to five hours. Table 3 lists the dates of my observations and interviews.

Table 3

Dates of Observations and Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Observation</th>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Observation</th>
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<td></td>
<td>8/31/2009</td>
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Bailey (2007) discussed the difficulty in determining the level of involvement for a researcher because, “. . . the degree of engagement is often highly variable, and the mere act of observing can function as a form of interacting because of its potential for reactivity” (p. 81). As a participant observer my time at HH varied from taking field notes, to informally chatting, or to giving a helping hand when asked. Since my research was to understand why the volunteers do what they do, it had a “. . . large influence on the level of [my] participation” (p. 81). Dressed in barn gear (sweatshirt, jeans, and work boots), I kept out of the way “taking things in” picking up an occasional brush or hoof pick when asked. I was a “barn rat,” a good thing in the eyes of the HH staff and volunteers. I “chipped in” when invited to climb the loft to sort, fold, and store horse blankets. I swept the aisleways, all the while listening and trying to absorb as much of the environment as possible. I attempted to be a fly on the wall, recording events and impressions in my field journal while sitting out by the muck pile or in corner of the arena. But as Czarniawska (2004) stated, “there are no entirely unobtrusive methods” (p. 50).

Data Analysis

I personally transcribed the audio-recorded HH interviews in their entirety. While transcribing, I was “. . . able to add context, nonverbal information, and bracketed notations” (Hatch, 2002, p. 113), and hear once again the voices of the participants. Initially I penciled or highlighted sections of the interview transcripts that I thought referenced my research questions. I used ATLAS Ti, a computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) to code the transcripts, that is, to assign descriptive words
and/or phrases to sections of each transcript that I found to represent an aspect of my research. Specific codes were derived from my research questions, while others developed as a result of comparing and contrasting my interviews and field notes.

My initial categories for coding were very general and included: duties, feelings, personal history, reasons for volunteering, typical day, and staying. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) suggested that “codes are organizing principles that are not set in stone. . . . They can be expanded, changed, or scrapped altogether as our ideas develop through repeated interactions with the data” (p. 32). I expanded my coding to 26 descriptors. Table 2 lists the codes I created for HH participant interviews. Items in parentheses are to clarify the meaning of the code.

Having conducted 22 interviews and processed each interview transcript with a specific number of 24 possible codes required me to “penetrate behind the fragmented information and a variety of sources to locate the primary story (or stories) that informs the practices and interpretation of community events” (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 166). Several readings of the transcripts and coding led me to “further reduce the data by identifying and combining the initial coded data into larger categories” (Bailey, 2007, p. 129). This coding reduction led to the major headings in my “Findings” section. The reader will also encounter vignettes within my thesis in which I “. . . present a theory of the organization of the events described, and to portray the significance of the events to those involved in them” (Erickson, 1986, p. 151). My goal is to help the reader identify what transpired at HH from my perspective and that of the participants, in order to link
Table 4

*Interview Codes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Affect on Pegasus (of volunteering)</th>
<th>Personal History</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affect on Riders (personal)</td>
<td>Previous Volunteering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Best experience</td>
<td>Qualities (of a volunteer)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career (support for)</td>
<td>Reason (for volunteering is) horses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics (of a volunteer)</td>
<td>Reason (for volunteering is) kids</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability (personal description)</td>
<td>Reason (for volunteering is) others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duties</td>
<td>Recognize need (for volunteering)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling Appreciated</td>
<td>Staying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings (emotional responses)</td>
<td>Time Spent (volunteering)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horses (comments about)</td>
<td>Type (of volunteer, long term or short)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction/Rider</td>
<td>Typical day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction/Volunteers</td>
<td>Sharing Stories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental support (for youth)</td>
<td>Youth Image</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Gain</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“. . . the local meanings discovered . . . to related theory and research” (Hatch, 2002, p. 227). The reader will discover in my Findings section that I segregate the adult and youth narratives within the major headings of: Arrival at HH, Volunteer Qualities and Characteristics, Perceived Benefits, Relationships and A Sense of Community, and Staying. Before my analysis began, I hypothesized that there would be a difference in the narratives between adults and youth. Initially I believed I would discover that the driving force behind youth volunteering and remaining at HH was the aspect of working around
 horses with the prospect of riding them. As I carried out my analysis I retained this format in order to compare and contrast the two groups. By retaining the adult versus youth format in my findings I offer the reader the opportunity to compare and contrast the narratives as I did.

Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) contend that positivist paradigms are not applicable to the naturalistic (qualitative) paradigm, of which narrative inquiry is a part. They write that positivist research criteria requires that: a single reality can be separated into its component parts, the knower and the known are independent of each other, generalizations made regarding the study are time and context free, real causes exist that are dependent on the time they are researched, and the inquiry process be value free. The positivist perspective requires that research exhibit: internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity. In contrast, the naturalistic inquirer uses a holistic approach in which multiple realities exist that can be constructed and understood. In a naturalist inquiry, the knower and the known are not only inseparable but are interactive as well. Naturalistic research hypotheses are time and contextually bound. Because naturalistic researchers contend that context always influences social activity in complex ways, cause-and-effect relationships that extend beyond the case are not possible. Research conducted using the naturalistic paradigm is also value bound; the data interpretation is influenced by the researcher. The naturalistic paradigm therefore substitutes positivist internal validity with credibility, external validity with transferability, reliability with dependability, and objectivity with confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).
To address the naturalistic criteria of research credibility, over the years, I spent many hours at HH conducting interviews, and writing observations. This extended time in the field is referred to by Lincoln & Guba (1985) as “prolonged engagement” (p. 301). In order for individuals interested in my research to compare it to a similar context, the criteria of transferability required me to attend to as much detail as possible. Lincoln & Guba (1985) refer to this extensive detail as “thick description” (p. 125). The reader is directed to the vignettes within the thesis which respond to the concept of transferability. To establish dependability, I kept thorough records of all research activities such that an inquiry audit of my research may be undertaken. An inquiry audit would include making available my field notes, analytic memos, raw data (transcripts, which I took care to transcribe accurately, and audio recordings), and any other personal documents for review. Confirmability can be established by comparing my data (transcripts etc.) to my analytic technique, the suitability of my categories, and determining if alternative paths might have been taken to reach the same conclusion.

Reflexivity is an aspect of qualitative research that concerns itself with the procedures by which the researchers “. . . report on personal beliefs, values, and biases that may shape their inquiry” (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Throughout my study I documented my personal biases and reflections through journal writing, audio-journaling, and including commentary in field notes. My field notes for example, not only contained concrete observations, but my personal thought about HH and its community. I kept a hand-held digital recorder in the ashtray of my truck so that when leaving HH, I could record my impressions of my visit. In addition, by revisiting my data, particularly
transcript coding, I discovered themes I had not considered and discarded themes for those that better described my findings. For example, in the early stages of my research I expected to discover a difference between the HH adults and youth related to their reasons for volunteering. I found this not to be the case. Through reflecting on my own role in the study and allowing the participants and the data to guide me, I worked to be reflexive throughout the study.
CHAPTER III

FINDINGS

Three hours can fly by when I am at my barn, sweeping, riding, or grooming my mare. Do individuals arrive at \textit{HH} hoping to experience the same thing—time flying by? They are away from their everyday surroundings. The demands for their time are what they make them. Barn work, such as mucking out a stall, or cleaning tack, are mindless activities which I believe we all need to keep our sanity and process a problem or two. There have been times when I have been distraught, drove out to my barn, walked into my mare’s stall, put my arms around her neck, and sobbed into her mane. That being done, I picked up a pitchfork, mucked her stall, and left with weightless shoulders. My barn is not home and neither is \textit{HH}.

It could be that some folks just have to be busy. Maybe how much they do defines them. I do not think that is the case at HH. I believe that \textit{HH} volunteers are there for reasons other than adding to their resumes, and during my time at \textit{HH}, I observed them to be engaged, cheerful, and committed. A good deal of laughter is mixed in with the hustle and bustle of \textit{HH}.

In her work on end-of life care, Foster (2002) “. . . perceived hospice to be both an organizational context and a cultural lens through which volunteers experience, interpret, and define their actions” (p. 246). Paolicchi (1995) remarked that volunteers are joined by a common culture and by sharing common activities have a sense of being related. I came to view \textit{HH} from a similar perspective. I present my data primarily from
the participant’s point of view in regard to their arrival at HH, the qualities and the
classifications they consider a volunteer possessing, the benefits they report receiving as
a result of giving of their time at HH, their stories of interactions with riders and other
volunteers, and their reasons for remaining at HH.

Throughout my thesis I refer to the participants “giving of their time” as a
metaphor for volunteering. Mowen and Sujan (2005) referred to volunteerism being
similar to charitable giving “because it involves the gift of time to a nonprofit
organization” (p. 171). Without the continued “charitable giving” provided by volunteers,
it is possible that the organization known as Helping Hooves would cease to exist.

Arrival at HH

Adults

For 13 years Pamela and her daughters, Anna and Sandra, have been volunteering
at HH. “I just did it because I wanted to be with my daughter and I wanted to interact
with her,” said Pamela. The “her” refers to oldest daughter Anna who was born with
severe hydrocephalus, developmental delays, motor control issues, and who didn’t walk
until she was two years old. Anna’s therapy mobilized Pamela and her daughter Sandra to
volunteer. Pamela is now a riding instructor and in 2009 has been volunteering for 18
years.

Searching for equine-assisted therapy was a critical event in the lives of mother
and daughter, Joyce and Kelly. Joyce revealed, “I can’t talk about my volunteering
without talking about hers [Kelly], because we’re a package.” Joyce told of her daughter
Kelly’s learning disabilities and low self-esteem that “could not have been lower.” While
Kelly was riding, Pamela began working in the barn or leading her daughter around in the arena during lessons for support.

“I was in the room for 5 minutes, and they [HH staff] said, ‘Well we don’t have enough volunteers, would you work in a class?’” As of 2009, Kate has been volunteering for 14 years and is now the program director for HH. The disability of her daughter brought them both to HH long term.

Gayle’s arrival was serendipitous. Looking for respite from her work as a sales representative, she stopped at HH to purchase tickets for a horse training seminar. After talking to some of the volunteers she determined her previous background in special education would be a good mesh. “I knew about children with special needs, I loved horses, and I thought what a better way to combine them,” she said.

Retirement brought Gabby and Dotty to HH. Gabby a self-proclaimed workaholic said, “I was losing my mind; [after two weeks of retirement], I had to have something to do and I missed the people.” She began her extended engagement with HH by grooming horses. I met Dotty, after she had been volunteering at HH for eight years. Dotty had previously been working on a local archeological project which came to an end when the dig was shut down due to homes being built on the site. Having lost her husband three years before, Dotty was looking for something to do when she spotted an advertisement in her church bulletin. As a retired nurse, “I thought it would be interesting to work with the children with disabilities, because I had worked with Polio patients.” Dotty came to volunteer at HH because of the children. “Definitely the children, I’m still not a horse
person,” Dotty commented. I nicknamed this octogenarian “nanny” since she does all the odd jobs around HH. “I just put things away and organize and straighten up,” she said.

With children grown, moving to a new location, and an interest in horses, Janelle began volunteering at HH for something to do. Perry, a fireman/paramedic arrived on the scene with his Lions Club to do their annual “cleaning-up” of HH. While eating lunch and observing riders during their lessons, Perry remarked that when the children got on a horse, “. . . they lit up and smiled and it was like their whole attitude changed.”

It was a simple phrase, “Would you like to volunteer?” asked by an HH volunteer, to which Perry answered, “Yes!” seven months ago. Every nonprofit organization is in the hope that they encounter individuals like Perry who reply with a resounding “Yes!” when asked to give of their time. I discovered that the “charitable giving“ of the HH volunteers interviewed was not always as spontaneous. The adult narratives told of a decision to volunteer that was planned.

According to Omoto, Snyder, and Martino (2000) people of different ages and stages in their lives are faced with a variety of concerns which may lead to volunteerism. In their study of hospice volunteers aged 19 to 76 years old, they focused on two reasons for volunteering: interpersonal or societal concerns and establishing a sense of purpose and commitment to society. The authors determined that relationship motivation was the driving force for younger volunteers and a sense of service was not significantly different across the volunteer age groups. The researchers also reported that “. . . older volunteers seek out volunteer opportunities as a result of a loss of productive roles, including paid employment” (p. 187), which match the stories of Dotty, Gabby, and Janelle. Viewing
volunteering as a part of a retirement lifestyle as reported by Smith (2004) may also reflect \textit{HH} adult choices to volunteer. Warburton and Terry (2000) studying older Australians’ volunteer decisions proposed a cascade effect, “. . . suggesting that the tendency to have a positive attitude toward volunteering acts to engender a sense of moral obligation to perform the behavior, which in turn influences intention to volunteer” (p. 254). Developing a conceptual framework, Choi (2003) suggested that environmental factors, such as where a person lives and their religion as well as social-structural factors, such as age, gender, education, income, religion, or job, are considered to be predictive of an older adult’s decision to volunteer.

Motivations to volunteer have been researched using the functional approach to volunteering which suggests that individuals will engage in, be satisfied with, and continue volunteering, if the service environment, such as a nonprofit organization (NPO), supports their psychological functions such a social relationships, new learning experiences, career related benefits, and so forth (Allison, Okun, & Dutridge, 2002; Clary et al., 1998; Houle, Sagarin, & Kaplan, 2005; Okun & Schultz, 2003). Rather than researching volunteer motivation by survey or a survey/brief interviews, Young (2004) approached volunteer motivation from a value-free holistic method using interview conversations as data to understand the meanings volunteers give to their experience. She discovered inward-outward dimensions of motivation based on outward social aspects and inward personal aspects she termed: getting-giving, continuity-newness, distance-proximity, and thought-action, all of which could be applied to the \textit{HH} narratives of the adult and youth volunteers. NPOs who require continuing help can benefit from
analyzing how their specific facility can attract and retain adult volunteers by targeting their personal needs and identifying specific motivational influences.

*Youth*

“I’ve been there [HH] like more than half my life,” said 18-year-old Lenore. She was eight years old when she wanted to earn a horsemanship badge from the Girl Scouts but was ‘closed out’ of the session. Her mother discovered *HH*, “So she signed me up for that. We thought we should start volunteering at the same time. So I don’t even remember starting there [HH],” related Lenore. Too young to start volunteering, Emmy, who absolutely loves horses, watched her sister and cousin volunteer, and was 14 when she began volunteering two years ago. “I wanted to be around them a lot, and I found out it was helping children and adults with disabilities, and that just made it 10 times better,” she said.

Anna began riding when she was four as a result of being born with hydrocephaly. “That’s why I started here [HH] in the first place. I still have a balance problem,” she said. Sandra, her younger sister was roughly three years old, when her mother began bringing her to *HH*. “I was practically born in the barn,” said Sandra, and told me that she was eight years old when she actually began to volunteer 12 years previous. Sandra came to *HH* by default; for Anna it was her disability that brought her to *HH*.

Kelly would get frustrated doing school work, stare at math problems, and “get stuck,” she added. “I had a really rough school year, and we [her parents] decided I needed someplace I could go to and do something to keep my mind off of school work.”
Kelly arrived at *HH* as a result of emotional difficulties and volunteering eventually followed. Kelly has been volunteering for five years. Monica has Aspergers syndrome and had difficulty expressing herself during our interviews, but she was very certain about why she began volunteering a year ago, “I love working with the kids . . . and learning what disability they have, and seeing more new horses.”

Termed “legacy volunteers by the nonprofit sector,” Lenore, Emmy, Kelly, Sandy, and her sister Anna, are “. . . children who adopt the volunteer habit of their parents” (Mustillo, Wilson, & Lynch, 2004, p. 531). Their study reported that “volunteering runs in families, and that family units are important carriers of the volunteer tradition” (p. 538). Using retrospective self-reports, Bekkers (2007) suggested the influence of parental volunteering was significantly stronger for respondents whose lives closely resembled those of their parents [i.e., they remained close to home as adults]. Sundeen and Raskoff (2000) wrote that 34% of the individuals in their study learned about volunteering through a family member or friend or benefitted from the activity. The question arises as to whether more parent/child volunteering examples exist at *HH* that were not part of this research, and if this modeling effect would be found in other equine-assisted therapy NPOs or would be found in NPOs offering different services. If the family-type (extended family, merged family, etc.) unit is a model of volunteering motivation, agencies would do well to sponsor family-type participation as part of their recruitment strategy. This would especially be valuable if the receiver of their services was a child.
Monica, Kelly, Billy, Anna, and Kevin were and/or are riders who transitioned from receivers of help to givers of help. The disabilities of these volunteer youth range from Aspergers syndrome, leg amputation, emotional disturbance, hydrocephaly, and spina bifida. Each of these volunteers with disabilities had strong parental support to initially ride and then achieve volunteer status. The youth identified their reasons for volunteering as a way to help with frustration at school, meeting new kids, seeing more horses, loving horses, loving horses, and loving horses. These young people were welcomed as they stepped from one role into the next or had their feet in both worlds. Roker et al. (1998) wrote that for the first time some of the youth with disabilities in their study had the chance to give rather than receive, which I found to be the case with the HHH youth I interviewed. Each of the youth was give the opportunity to take on as much volunteering as they were able to provide.

Volunteering at HH was “... an opportunity to do something else,” said 15-year-old Robin who is home-schooled via the Internet, and lives near HH. “I was bored, and I needed something to do. I couldn’t get a job,” she said referring the previous summer when she first began volunteering at HH. Robin has two horses and thought she could learn something to help with her mare that had an “attitude problem.” “I’ve never really known somebody with special needs, so I was kind of interested in that,” she added. Robin is the first person in her family to volunteer. Similar to Lenore’s story, Carmella, a senior in high school, came by way of the Girl Scouts for a few weeks of riding when she was in third grade. She liked the experience and when she was 15 saw an advertisement
in the newspaper. Knowing a friend who volunteered at HH, she “got signed up” three years ago. A plus for Carmella is working with the horses.

The HH youth are volunteering to help other youth. As Haski-Leventhal, Ronel, York, and ben David (2008) suggested, “. . . youth volunteers present similar characteristics to those of the target population and thus may have a better chance to reach out to them” (p. 837). I found it difficult to separate volunteer motivations from the benefits they receive while volunteering. These seem to blend with motivational reasons to volunteer cited in the research literature and cross over to adult motivational research such as satisfaction, career goals, status, need for recognition, or social needs (Allison et al., 2000; Clary et al. 1998; Okun and Schultz, 2003; Omoto et al. 2000; Schondel & Boehm 2000; Sundeen and Raskoff, 2000). Similar to MacNella’s (2008) study, “. . . pre-existing relationships with the organization supported positive initial perceptions” (p. 131) which may have served to promote volunteering at all age levels.

*Arrival from the HH Staff Perspective*

When asked why she thought the volunteers came to HH, Tessa, one of HH’s riding instructors replied, “Sometimes the kids. Some will say ‘I like working with kids and horses.’ Most of the time, particularly your younger volunteers, [it’s] the horses.” She also mentioned that she thought it was a destressor, a “. . . calming type of thing and it’s therapeutic for them too.” Tessa told of college students who chose to volunteer at HH as part of an extended service-learning program related to their specific program of studies. The students participate in volunteer duties (after a volunteer orientation) for a specified number of hours (usually 40) determined by their university. “They can pick
other places. They do the hours they need to do. Some of them continue to come, or some will come back the next year.” Tessa herself came for the love of horses.

Colleen, the director of HH, said some of the reasons people come to HH are varied, “The children, the horses, and they feel they are appreciated when they come here. I think everybody needs to be needed and I think that’s why people give [volunteer]. There’s that sense of need.” Colleen compared the arrival of the volunteers similar to that of the horses’ arrivals: “With our horses, as with our volunteers, they’ve all come from other careers, but they settle here.”

Patrice, the volunteer coordinator, echoed Tessa’s and Colleen’s remarks: “They come because they’re already horse people, and they want to continue to work that way. Some come because of their interest in working with children with disabilities.” In reference to young girls volunteering it is “. . . something they can do outside of school as a group.” The reader will notice that the participants in this study are predominantly females. I asked some of the participants for their thoughts on this imbalance, but they replied that they were not sure. Staff comments gave me the chance to hear how they viewed the volunteers’ arrival at HH. An opportunity for staff to discuss these aspects of volunteer interests and participation may benefit the HH recruitment program of adult and youth. A youth council could be established within HH to help create novel programs or outings to bring the HH youth community together on a regular basis.

Each of the 22 volunteers took similar but unique paths, as well as specific times to arrive at HH. Their journeys started as a result of a physical or emotional disability, the
beginning of retirement, their love of horses or children, and as a respite from their
everyday work or school responsibilities.

A specific event that initially mobilized a person to become involved in voluntary
activity is situated in both space and time. Although the event may serve to
stimulate further activity for the person in question, it is still the case that the
pleasure derived is closely associated with a specific event. Its contingent and
personalized nature proves difficult to translate into another person’s lived

As my thesis continues, the reader will find times and spaces that are very
personal to each participant, but which they may unknowingly share in their lived
experiences at Helping Hooves.

Volunteer Qualities and Characteristics

As I leave HH’s indoor arena, I notice Billy, a 17-year-old rider/volunteer
grooming a grey and white Arabian mare named Kitty. Billy isn’t riding anymore. He’s
been having recurring problems with his prosthetic leg. He can however groom and sit
down whenever he is tired. Billy waves and asks, “So how’s your paper going?” I tell
him I think it’ll take some time to write. Kitty is dozing in the cross-ties, eyes closed, her
pink lower lip gently flapping up and down. Her hair and the hair of other horses lay in
clumps on the rubber floor mats. I ask Billy if he could give me three characteristics that
a volunteer should have to work at HH. He steps back from grooming Kitty, and thinks,
not giving me an immediate answer. I rephrase the question. He replies that a volunteer
should learn how to work with animals, know barn work, like brushing, feeding, and
grooming, know how to take instructions, and have patience. Billy has been brushing, feeding, and grooming at HH for three years.

Throughout my interviews, it was my goal to discern what qualities and characteristics the volunteers would identify as required in order to contribute to the HH community. Would the adult volunteers list the same characteristics and qualities as the youth volunteers? The following statements were made from a youth perspective:

- “You have to be patient with the horses because sometimes they don’t understand what you want.”
- “You have to be accepting toward people . . . confident, so that the horses will respect you and the students can look up to you as someone to trust.”
- “It means helping people, doing something not for yourself, but for other people . . . They’re giving up their time and very dedicated toward what they do.”

A sample of adult comments includes:

- “It’s a passion and commitment for everything about this place.”
- “Compassion for the kids that ride, that have handicaps, and might not be able to function as well on their own elsewhere.”

Across interviews, the identified characteristics and qualities of a volunteer were similar.

Adults

Gayle views an HH volunteer as having “. . . a passion and a commitment for everything about this place [HH],” and having the tenacity, to arrive at 8 o’clock in the morning “when [there is] two feet of snow, and . . . ice and rain, and they aren’t getting
paid.” Dotty sees volunteering as “. . . an attitude of life really, willingness to serve others and not everybody’s willing to serve others.” A characteristic of giving that Janelle identified was, “Just wanting to do something without being compensated monetarily. A certain amount of sacrifice timewise.”

The words used by adults, to essentially portray themselves, were familiar ones. Tenacity, a descriptor used by Gayle, was a word that I found interesting as it expressed not only the cohesiveness of the volunteer population but expressed the persistence with which the volunteers carry out their duties. This persistence in volunteering is expressed in the number of hours that the HH volunteer community provides. It is interesting to note that Dotty provided the highest number of volunteer hours for the 2008-09 period followed by Carmella, a youth volunteer who said she had, “500 and some hours.”

Youth

The HH youth statements reflected those of the adults. Anna remarked, “You either really care about the kids and like, really want to be involved with the horses and stuff, or you don’t.” Monica listed being “. . . trustworthy, kind, honest, and very kind to others.” She also told me that she thought HH personnel saw her as, “A very loving person, and an honest person, and a very respectful person.” I asked Monica if she viewed herself as having these qualities, and without hesitation she replied, “Absolutely!” In Robin’s opinion a volunteer is, “A nice person, a nice normal citizen. They’re people of all ages, sizes, and gender. . . . There’s men, and women, and older people.” Emmy presented a snapshot of the characteristics she thought a volunteer should possess, “I
really like seeing somebody that’s really interested in the riders, and that will take the
time to talk to them, and to work through with whatever problem they’re [rider] having.”

While interviewing the youth, I heard them characterize themselves without being
aware of it. Lo (2001) wrote a personal narrative on being a teen volunteer at a hospice in
Florida. He described members of his teen council as caring and compassionate with the
strength of the council being “. . . in its ability to foster teamwork and commitment” (p.
130). Carmella spoke of her level of commitment when she told me that at the yearly
volunteer banquet she was recognized as having “. . . the second highest on my hours, I
have 500 hours for the year. I’m there at least three days a week.” She was topped for the
year by octogenarian Dotty. I observed the spirit of youth teamwork not only during rider
lessons where they guided and supported their riders, but doing chores throughout the
facility, and like Lo experienced at hospice, introducing and instructing new volunteers to
HH.

Research literature describes volunteers as possessing theory driven
characteristics such as extroversion, less need of autonomy, ego, self-efficacy,
agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness to experience, sociability, and gregariousness
(Carlo, Okun, Knight, Rosario, & de Guzman, 2005; Marta & Pozzi, 2008; Wardell,
Lishman, & Whalley, 2000). The qualities and characteristics described by the HH
volunteers are those I also believe they possess, and are those I believe the volunteers
observe in their HH colleagues. The Helping Hooves’ narratives allow the reader to hear
what the participants personally considered characteristics of a volunteer, as opposed to
those suggested or categorized by a researcher.
Perceived Benefits

When I first spoke with Monica’s mother about my research and interview process, she informed me that 16-year-old Monica had Aspergers syndrome, and that she might stutter or take a while to respond to my questions. I assured the mother that I was interested in what Monica had to say, not how she said it. I followed Monica and her horse Judge from the indoor arena to the outside obstacle course and back again during her weekly riding lesson. After the lesson, we chose a bench outside the arena for our interview. The annual Horse Show was close at hand and Monica would be riding in two events as well as volunteering for the ‘Games’ course during the show. At times in our interview, Monica struggled to find the right words. I would then either ask the question in another way or tell her that we would come back to it. I recognized from her facial expressions when she was having difficulty, and by redirecting the question, was able put her at ease, and continue our conversation. Monica shared a feeling of being appreciated when she told me, “When the instructors tell the students to ‘Say thank you to your volunteers’ at the end of class. To me, I think that’s really special.” She related how students at her high school treated her differently and she thought the seniors gave her “very good respect,” but that other students in her school did not. Monica said, “. . . people respect others here [HH]. They always listen to the rules, and they always respect the HH property.” I asked Monica if she experienced a difference in her level of comfort when at school and when at HH. She said her comfort level at HH was a 10, whereas at school it was a 5, suggesting to me that she viewed HH as a respite from stress. “Some of the kids here at HH get treated differently when they’re at school, but when they come to
“HH they get treated the right way,” she said. At the end of our interview I again asked Monica how she felt about riding and volunteering at HH. She replied, “I feel really good about myself, and that’s all I can think of.”

One of my research questions was to determine what the volunteers receive in return for their time spent at HH, since none of them obtained monetary compensation. MacNella (2008) wrote that benefits are “. . . the achievement of motives and unanticipated rewards that emerged” during a volunteer’s experiences (p. 132). A reward of volunteering may be social in that volunteers develop friendships with other volunteers as well as the clients (Moore & Allen, 1996; Omoto & Snyder, 2002; Omoto et al., 2000; Wardell et al. 2000; Wilson, 2000; Wilson & Musick, 1999). I propose that HH volunteers may have casually or privately spoken of the benefits they received while working at Helping Hooves, but that our interview sessions were the single instance in which they have publicly expressed what they gained as a result of their HH experience.

Adults

Pamela and Joyce, both mothers, spoke from the point of view of the effect HH had on their daughters and their family life. “I feel good about what my girls [Anna and Sandra] are doing,” said Pamela. “We have a family interaction. We have a family bond, we can always talk about this.” Pamela made a hand motion that encompassed the HH arena. “I think the most important thing to me is to be able to have that connection with my girls.” Pamela views HH a safe place for her daughters; she does not always have to stay with them. Regarding this safety aspect of HH, Pamela commented, “It’s really important for Sandra, my daughter with disabilities; because she feels that she can be
capable and competent and doesn’t need her mom with her all the time.” Pamela’s eyes mist over and she looks downward as she explains the effects of HH on her family; “The more time we spend out here, the more proud I am of my girls. I could just get tears in my eyes driving home some nights.” She expressed further parental feelings by saying,

Sometimes as a parent you get so involved in your child’s disability [emphasis on disability] that you forget to look at their abilities [emphasis on abilities], and working with other students, I would go home and say, ‘Thank God, we have the best case scenario,’ considering how sick she [Sandra] was as a child.

Joyce who had volunteered for five years, spoke of the difference HH made on her daughter Kelly; “My daughter had such a boost of her self-esteem, she got comfortable enough to work in the [HH] classes. The children looked up to her and she was buoyed by that.” Like Pamela, Joyce noticed a change in her home environment; “I felt that it [HH] made such a wonderful difference in my daughter, that the change in her affected the whole family, and it affected me.” The “effect” was her level of happiness and the happiness she observed in her child. “School life for my daughter changed dramatically, all her oral presentations were horse related, she had something that her peers necessarily didn’t know everything about,” Joyce said as only a proud mother could.

After coding and compiling my transcript data I noticed that the benefits received by the adults corresponded to their reasons for coming to volunteer at HH. For Perry, the fireman, working with the children and seeing them smile was his payback but volunteering at HH was also soothing and relaxing. “When I come out here, I can just
throw tension [away]. Say I’ve had [responded to] a head-on collision, and I’ve had a real bad call, I come out here and all of sudden that all leaves me, I’m out here, I just feel good being out here.” I believe Perry considers his volunteering as an intangible endowment to HH, specifically when he acknowledged, “Everyone wants to leave their mark in this society . . . I can leave this [HH] someday and say ‘Yes I made a difference in someone’s life, I made a difference working out here.’”

“I feel like I’ve gotten as much out of it as the time I’ve put in,” commented Janelle, a four-year volunteer, who sees reciprocity in volunteering. The effect the HH program has on its riders has been important to her, when she said, “Seeing their [riders] progression, how they learn to groom and feel comfortable riding and learning is just rewarding. Just working with the kids, and helping them feel comfortable with the horses is meaningful to me.” Learning more about horses and increasing her comfort level with large animals, has been Janelle’s additional benefit. For Gayle the benefit was a young rider. “I saw her the very first day she rode. I sidewalked with her, she had a death grip around my leg, she was so scared, she was maybe six or so - a year later, she’s trotting independently. That’s what I get out of it,” said Gayle. She added, “I don’t think that you can be here and not get something out of it. I don’t think that it may be always readily apparent when you’re here.” Gayle itemized a few of the benefits; “It’s a sense of pride, a sense of accomplishment, a sense of being needed, being wanted. It’s learning. Every day there’s something you can learn.” Gayle has learned a thing or two since I first met her in 2005. As of 2009 after six years of service, Gayle is a certified stable manager at HH and continues her volunteering.
A reward of volunteering cited by Wardell et al. (2000) is, “...being involved with something which had obvious benefits to the service users” (p. 238). The service users of HH were the riders who were mentioned often by the volunteers in their narratives.

Youth

Gaining self-esteem was an unintended benefit for Sandra.

People seem to accept me more here [HH]. At school you have certain groups and cliques, and stuff... people have to be the same. Everybody out here is different...

...a lot of people are different, and it’s more accepting, more accepting here.

Sandra revealed, “I feel more alive. I don’t have to watch what I’m saying or what I’m doing... because people accept me this way. I can just be myself. I feel pretty good.”

Sandra’s sister Anna spoke of feeling more responsible since she was taking care of children as they rode. Volunteering, she said, “Helps me to be more of a leader in other situations, like at school, I always take the leadership role and I just feel better about myself.”

Volunteering since she was eight years old, Lenore, now 18, told me she will be leaving for college soon to begin her studies in animal science and pre-veterinary medicine. “I’m excited about that,” Lenore said with a big smile. “Personally, it’s made me so much more disciplined, like working there [HH] you have to be so focused and like concentrate on what you’re doing, I want to work harder, and it sort of transitions into other parts [of life],” the ‘other part’ being Lenore’s studies. She explained that as a child she was shy, “It’s made me more open towards people... like when I’m outside the
farm [HH] . . . overall it makes you a more open person, you’re not as quick to judge people. It just makes you look at the world differently.”

For home-schooled 15-year old Robin, volunteering for a year has helped her to be more outgoing. “It makes me kind of talk more and relate more to the people,” and later commented, “Well you feel good, because you’re doing something, not just sitting around watching TV all the time.” My interview with Robin took place over summer and her comments at the time do not reflect the educational program of home schooling.

Emmy is 16 and is home schooled as well. Her comments reflected those of Lenore when she told me that she learned, “Don’t judge by appearance, and look at the inside of people, that’s what really counts.” She also said it was a humbling experience to see individuals “in a situation a lot worse than mine. So, it’s like ‘Just forget about what you think is going wrong in your life.’”

More than half of the young volunteers mentioned their HH experience helped them in some way ‘like’ Emmy who said,

I’ve always wanted to do something with horses . . . like training, like being a riding instructor. I really haven’t decided yet, but something along those lines, and definitely being at HH has made me like, “Hey, that’s actually something I would like to do,” so it’s given me more ideas.

Sandra who an HH rider is thinking about Occupational Therapy because it relates to what she is doing at HH, “I’ve been wanting to do a career, like helping kids with disabilities,” she said. Sandra is still volunteering while attending college. Her sister Anna, when first interviewed in 2005, responded, “I want to be an instructor [for riding].
I’m going to start into assistant instructor in training.” After being part of HH for 17 years, the summer of 2009 found Anna a member of HH’s Barn Management team and an instructor in training. She will follow in her mother’s footsteps as an NARHA therapeutic riding instructor. Pamela left a legacy of volunteering for both of her daughters.

Literature on adolescent volunteering report that skills acquired relative to a career may be the reason for and the benefits of volunteering (Hamilton & Fenzel, 1988; Johnson, Beebe, Mortimer, & Snyder, 1998). Ellis (1993) wrote that, “Volunteerism not only promotes career development but also serves as an excellent enhancement to the job search process” (p. 129). The youth of HH work alongside adults, and as Metz, McLellan, and Youniss (2003) suggested they are “. . . exposed to definite political-moral rationales for social action” (p. 200), upon which they can reflect. Using the term civic engagement, Cemalcilar (2009) reported that the accumulation of experiences, “. . . contribute to the volunteers’ psychological and social development” (p. 435). An increase in self-confidence and a pride in accomplishments were reported by Eley (2003) as a result of youth participation in volunteering. Each interview revealed benefits thought to be unique to the individual but were actually shared across the HH community. The volunteers recorded their hours in a log book, but no money changed hands. HH benefits will not appear on any pay stub. Kelly, a youth volunteer/rider, made two insightful comments that sum up this section. She described that after a volunteer has worked with a specific rider for a span of time, “. . . and the kids went from this to here [she shows me
with her hands pointing to two distant spots on the floor], and they can see that change, it makes you feel like you were part of something big!”

NPOs must keep in mind the needs and expectations of its volunteers. Wardell et al. (2000) wrote, “. . . that if volunteers do not feel they are personally benefiting from volunteering, it is unlikely that their willingness to help will be sufficient to sustain their commitment” (p. 238). Volunteerism by definition excludes benefits of a tangible nature, and the HH volunteer narratives did not reveal such an expectation of tangible benefits as part of their partnership with HH. What the volunteers did report however, was receiving a sense of community, increased self-efficacy, a sense of satisfaction, and a sense of well-being; something money cannot buy.

Relationships and a Sense of Community

I notice Gabby leading a large white horse named Miller to the far end of the aisleway and attaching his halter to the crossties. Mona is waiting nearby, riding helmet on, seated in her wheelchair. Improper medication has left Mona with brain damage which prevents her from using her right hand and having limited use of her left. Her short term memory is affected as well. Mona reaches as far as she can to touch the tip of Miller’s nose. I listen to the sounds of the aisleway; laughter and words of encouragement. I observe volunteers guiding the riders as they tack up horses for the next lesson. Mona offers Miller a dish of cheerios, graham crackers, and a mint she has saved from her “meals on wheels trays.” Gabby smiles as she helps Mona stretch up and give Miller a kiss on his nose. I stand aside as a parade of horses, riders, and volunteers pass by, move into the arena and approach the mounting area where the volunteers assist the
riders into their saddles. Gabby steadies Mona as she stands, gives her two arm braces, and places her on a hydraulic lift which raises her to the height of Gabby’s shoulders so she can boost Mona into the saddle. Miller does not flinch.

This scene is played out many, many times over the course of a week with variations on the theme. During each interview a “rider story” was told which evoked strong feelings during the telling. Rider stories appeared to be a focal point for volunteers and the continuing relationships between each volunteer and their riders became part of the greater story that is Helping Hooves.

Adults and Riders

Perry looks out from under his large white Stetson cowboy hat, slaps the picnic table we’re sitting on, and says, “I’m always an absolute jokester out here! I have a goodtime. There’s not a kid out here that I can’t get to lighten up, smile, and do stuff.” He provides the main office with snapshots of the riders on their favorite horse. When first matched with a teen rider named Issak, Perry said the boy would just slump in his saddle and be “. . . like a little statue up there.” Perry thought Issak didn’t have a normal male relationship in his life, “. . . so me and him sort of bonded that way. He looks to me like the male figure he doesn’t probably have at home.” Like Perry, Kate has a bond with her weekday riders. “I’ve gotten attached to the riders on Thursdays. I’ve always volunteered on Thursdays and I couldn’t imagine not being here to help,” she said.

This section’s opening vignette is of the three-year progress made by 30-year-old Mona, her horse Miller, and her volunteer Gabby. Mona and her family received a diagnosis that Mona would never be able to do anything but sit in a wheelchair. When
Mona’s lessons first began, “. . . she had to wear a belt with a sidewalker on each side, and someone leading the horse. It wasn’t very much longer and she was down to one sidewalker and now look at her today. She is riding just with me leading Miller,” marveled Gabby.

Mothers, Pamela, Joyce, and Kate spoke almost exclusively of their daughters, who to them, were not only riders of special interest, but in their minds, were part of the strongest relationships at HH.

**Youth and Riders**

Carmella, a high school senior, made me aware of the strong bond that exists between volunteer and rider.

I guess the fact that everyone has this one rider that they always work with and that always means the most to them. Everyone finds this certain one [rider], like everyone has their own, like person, to go to and work with. Carmella’s “special rider” is Brenda, a girl close to her own age. “She calls me her best friend. I’m her best friend!” she said enthusiastically. “She doesn’t talk to anyone until I come in [to the gathering room]. . . . She doesn’t talk to anyone else if they work with her!” After returning from a trip to Florida, Carmella brought Brenda a stuffed animal shaped like Pegasus, the winged mythological horse. “She [Brenda] was so excited to get it when I got back because I was gone for a week without her.” Carmella told of other riders who became her on-line friends on *FaceBook* and some who attend her high school and ride in an *HH* program for troubled youth.
Sixteen year-old Emmy tells of a young female rider, she has a strong bond with who loudly calls out “Emmmmmmy” before each lesson. “Like she really appreciated the help, like older girls’ company I guess,” said Emmy. This young volunteer placed special significance on her relationship with a rider. It was another example of an intangible benefit of being an HH volunteer.

“Oh my gosh there are so many,” Lenore responded when I asked about her best experience. She tells me of a little girl named Ella who began riding when she was three years old, and who is now 10. “She’s been riding there [HH] almost as long as I’ve been there,” laughed Lenore. Ella needed a lot of help during her early lessons, and with a big smile on her face Lenore recounted Ella’s progress.

It was really exciting to see [when she rode by herself], and you watched her grow up, this little tiny girl, and riding has just helped her so much. It’s cool to see.

She’s like my little sister in a way.

Donny, a young rider, arrived at HH unable to speak and unable to use his hands to support himself in the saddle. Over a year of Saturdays, Donny started “. . . saying his first words. It was just great . . . it was just nice to see that ,because you knew that you had a part in helping him,” said Anna. Like other youth volunteers in this study, Anna became animated when telling a “rider story,” which in this case, revealed the pride she felt in contributing to Donny’s progress.

“Think about the times since you’ve been volunteering at HH. Can you remember a time that was really, really special?” I asked. Monica tilted her head, made a little humming sound while tapping her chin with her index finger, and quickly replied,
“That’s an easy one. It’s when I met my friend Mary Murphy.” I wondered why meeting Mary was so special. “Because I was feeling lonely, and I needed another person that I could talk to,” said Monica who informed me that Mary was a rider like herself. The majority of volunteer narratives included a “rider story” that had a personal impact on the volunteer’s HH experience. For Monica, finding a supportive personal friendship was the personal connection that supported her resolution to continue volunteering and riding at HH.

Volunteers and Volunteers

Adults

The day is the Friday before Halloween. Three volunteers on horseback make their way past a paddock, heading back to the barn from a fall trail ride. As they get closer, I see each of them wearing a ghoulish white mask similar to paintings by the 19th century expressionist artist Edvard Munch depicting an agonized figure against a blood red sky. Readers might recall the 1996 movie “Scream” which displays this mask most prominently in its footage. I snap a photo of the trail-riding trio. Gabby begins her interview with her mask still on.

A typical day on a Friday . . . we [female volunteers] usually ride in the morning . . . for an hour, it’s actually for remedial purposes for the horses. . . . You can be outside and that’s what I love . . . rides in winter, summer, rain, who cares? Janelle is part of the Friday-morning ladies’ ride, “We don’t get together any other times, but we share our personal concerns and whatnot,” she said.
Gayle remarked that a nice part of being at *HH* is that everyone gets along. “The teenagers have kind of bonded and clicked with the adults. Even though I don’t have children we still have a good working relationship.” Gayle added,

It’s difficult to explain how everything interacts, but I think this is probably the ultimate in what they consider a team. . . . If somebody needs something, you don’t necessarily have to make a verbal statement, you just kind of know [what they need].

Gayle connects this silent volunteer language to working with horses where nonverbal cues are part of the animal’s training.

Pamela used the words *camaraderie* and *feeling good* when she speaks of the volunteer community. “I walk in and ‘Heyyy!’ [greeting] and no matter whether they’re a first time volunteer, or they’ve been coming for years, we welcome them we say, ‘Heyyy! Glad to have you. I’m glad you’re here’” Pamela said with energy. Perry, the self-proclaimed “jokester” told of meeting new friends, and true to his moniker, “We joke around all the time, because behind the scenes we pull some pranks on each other.” The reader more than likely knows that to pull off an effective prank, you must know the “victim” well enough to gauge their reactions in order that everyone involved can join in the secrecy and join in the fun. Perry knows the weak spots of his “victim volunteers.”

*Youth*

Kelly spoke highly of the other volunteers and the staff in general at *HH*. “They don’t judge you right away, you don’t have to be this certain person, you can be yourself, and they’ll like you no matter what.” For Kelly, as a rider and volunteer, this is
significant. She met one of her best friends while cleaning stalls together, and with whom she can share common HH experiences. “We’re all out here for the same purpose; to help with the children. We all have the same interest in horses,” Kelly said. Another youth volunteer/rider, Sandra, mentioned that the HH volunteers are more accepting of people who are “different.”

Carmella might consider meeting her boyfriend at HH as a personal benefit since they both volunteer, share events of the day, and along with the other youth volunteers, “. . . go for ice cream, hang out, have parties, and stuff.” Another lucky volunteer was Lenore who said, “My boyfriend is a volunteer on Saturday so that’s actually where we met. . . . It’s nice because he rides horses, and he likes volunteering as much as I do. ” Her closest friends are those she met while volunteering, and she finds it easy to share her experiences with other volunteers who are part of the HH community. “It’s hard to explain this, how important it [volunteering] is to me.” Having friends who understand her passion is an essential part of Lenore’s life, and she referred to HH as one big family because, “You get to share. It’s like you’re on the same page with them a lot, because you’re with all the same people, so you share the same stories with each other.” Sharing stories, I discover, is an everyday experience.

Each volunteer provided a narrative that spoke volumes of the effort and time they invest into seeing that each rider derives the most value from a lesson; they keep the riders safe, they keep the riders happy, and they develop partnerships with their riders that can span years. Volunteers forge friendships that, when working side by side, cross
generations, while anticipating the needs of each other without a word being spoken. Gayle expertly summed up the volunteer to volunteer interaction at HH,

There’s a bond here, no matter whether you’re having a bad day, or there may be a disagreement about what’s the best way to proceed. You respect each other’s boundaries. You respect what the person has to offer and you work through it. I don’t think that we could have a core of people that have stayed the course as long as they have if you didn’t have it [a bond].

The narratives presented in this section offer the reader a view of the relationships which are part of Helping Hooves. The reader need only to review the narratives of previous sections to recognize the community of HH, or as the volunteers repeated over and over again, the family aspect of HH. “I feel like I’m part of the HH farm,” said Perry. “I give a big part of my life to them out here. So I feel like I’m part of the family.” To Perry and the others at HH this includes the horses. “It saddens me, every time we have a horse that passes away. . . . I feel really bad about it,” he said. A paint mare named Wildfire was euthanized and the event of her passing saddened every person who had passed by her stall, brushed, fed, exercised, or ridden her. Each rider was personally informed of her death by one of the volunteers in order to transition the rider to another mount since some of them had ridden her for years. Wildfire’s photo was removed from her stall and posted on a memory wall. The HH family mourned.

Several of the volunteers referred to HH as a second home or second family as Perry did, which in the research of Wardell et al. (2000) “. . . was particularly important for those who lived on their own or who felt isolated” (p. 238). This statement does not
necessarily reflect *HH* volunteers, but rather supports the finding that NPOs need to provide a sense of place that is unique and inviting enough to attract volunteers and be managed in such a way as to foster a sense of belonging for its volunteers. A strong sense of inclusiveness will then translate into a sense of ownership and into a sense of pride. Individuals with a strong sense of ownership and with a dash of pride make for happy and productive volunteers. For *HH* this means a progression of positive and effective management strategies to nurture volunteer connectedness as well as maintain and hopefully increase its volunteer base.

**Staying**

How long can anyone volunteer for one organization? From a personal standpoint, I volunteered at my church for 22 years before I decided a younger generation could take the reins of the annual Confirmation program. My involvement was seasonal and although I felt part of a group working towards a common goal, I do not think I developed as close a relationship and a sense of community as did the volunteers at *HH* who gave of their time in a more consistent manner. I continued to be part of the program because I felt it was expected of me.

**Adults**

Gabby will stay as long as she can, “. . . because if I can’t work with the kids, or if I can’t ride anymore [due to physical ailments], I’ll work in the garden with Dotty [the octogenarian], because there’s always something to do.” I saw Dotty in the summer of 2009 at the annual Horse Show; she has been at *HH* for 11 years. In addition to being the *Master Gardener* for *HH*, she refurbishes donated trophies for the summer Horse Show
and scampers around the barn doing whatever needs to be done. Gayle had been at HH for seven years when in the summer of 2009 at the circus-themed Horse Show I saw her enter the arena dressed in a red and blue clown suit leading a small Shetland pony wearing an enormous ruffled collar. Gayle is now a member of the barn management team. When I interviewed her in 2005 she commented, “For me HH is not just a place, it’s more like a journey, because there’s always something new going on.” Joyce who arrived at HH with her daughters remarked, “What has kept me here is the positive atmosphere, the wonderful acceptance of the staff. . . . It’s [HH] a positive, reassuring, accepting, [and] encouraging atmosphere.” Kate spoke for herself and her daughters, “I think we stayed because we saw such value in what we were doing. All of us, including my youngest daughter, loved working in the classes, loved working with the kids.” Kate has been with HH for 11 years now and was my initial contact when returning for additional interviews in 2009 since she is now the farm’s Program Director. When I interviewed her in 2005 she told me,

I love to see what happens when you pair a disabled child with a horse. . . . It’s a miracle to see how the horses relate to their riders and how they create a bond, and the self-confidence that [it] gives them.

Pamela was an educator teaching third graders when I met her in 2005, and was part of a riding instructor program planning to teach English and Western riding upon her retirement. By the summer of 2009, after 19 year at HH, Pamela had achieved both goals; retirement and instructing riding at HH. Pamela and Kate both arrived at HH due to their daughters who were riders.
Youth

Lenore attributes working with young riders as her reason for staying the past 10 years. “You see them smiling and like having fun, like ‘oh my gosh, how can I not like, be a part of that?’ . . . It’s a fun place to be and like all the people, we’re a family on Saturday.” Lenore will be returning to HH over university holidays and during the summer. Emmy will stay as long as she can because of her love of horses and the people. “I love being a part of it!” She told me that only schooling or marriage would interrupt her volunteering. Kelly who began her partnership with HH as a rider, is now in her early 20s and as of 2009 still volunteering. She said, “. . . this [HH] has changed me in more ways than I thought it would. I just came here to relax and I’m going to stay here until I can’t [she laughs out loud as she finishes]—until they kick me out.” During my 2005 interview with Sandra, she said she became a rider when she was four years old. “I’m going to go here [locally] through college ‘cause I don’t want to leave.” Executing a plan on her terms, Sandra continues to volunteer during her last year of college in 2009. After 16 years volunteering, she is now part of the HH barn management team. Sandra’s younger sister Anna and her mother Pamela continue to share in the family volunteer experience. Having volunteered for five years, Carmella plans to continue her volunteering by attending a nearby college in 2010. “I plan on staying at HH. I hope to become an instructor some day.” Time will tell.

Monica, a 15 year-old rider/volunteer, provided the simplest of answers, “Forever!”
Whether a volunteer remains at HH for weeks, months, years, or forever, appears to be dependent on both the value they attach to their work and the level of interaction with the HH community. I believe HH volunteers remain because they develop a strong sense of place. I did not detect a sense of obligation that I felt toward the end my prolonged volunteering, but then I didn’t meet anyone who was at HH for more than 20 years either. The reader is directed to comments made by volunteers in previous sections with regard to their “special rider.” A smile on a rider’s face or hearing a child speak for the first time when he is on the back of a horse is motive enough for a HH volunteer to return. Upon hearing a comment of appreciation from an instructor, “I wouldn’t be able to do it without you helping. You’re the one who gets everything done,” can keep seasoned volunteers and novices walking into the arena and aisleways day after day.

An issue for any NPO in maintaining its volunteer base is cultivating goodwill through positive experiences for its personnel. Warburton and Terry (2000) suggested that organizations should focus on promoting social relationships to attract new volunteers and to maintain those who are already active. The authors also noted that it is important for an agency [in this case HH] to illustrate to potential volunteers that they would be able to accomplish what is required of them and that their efforts would not be limited. This would encourage individuals, particularly the older population, to give of their time. Wardell et al. (2000) stressed that with more organizations competing for volunteers, retaining existing volunteers within an organization is required in order to continue providing clients with its particular services. HH has overcome a barrier to social exclusion by encouraging its clients to participate in their volunteer program.
Volunteers who have a satisfied and committed relationship with their job see themselves as positively affecting the organization, and think they are being treated fairly “. . . should display a higher level of volunteer activity” (Penner, 2002, p. 459). Some of the veteran volunteers recorded upwards of 600 hours per year of volunteering.

Four years after my initial interviews in 2005, I revisited HH for Family Fun Day, the Annual Horse Show, and to conduct additional interviews. Family Fun Day is an open-house event to which the public is invited and given access to most of the grounds. Activities are designed to showcase the facilities. The volunteers and staff take care of every aspect of the event except for the food. The annual Horse Show for riders and volunteers exhibits the intense level of planning that goes into making the competition a success. Seeing familiar faces of horses and volunteers gave me a feeling of the constancy of HH. Additional structures had been built on the grounds, and there were new volunteers, new riders, and a few new horses. HH was trotting on; a blend of old and new.
CHAPTER IV
CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

My study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What paths did individuals take to arrive at Helping Hooves?

2. What are the personal histories of individuals who volunteer at Helping Hooves?

3. What are the perceived personal benefits of volunteering at Helping Hooves?

4. What interactions exist between volunteers and the Helping Hooves’ community?

5. What are the contributing factors for sustained volunteering at Helping Hooves?

My first research question required that I determine how the volunteers arrived at HH. Some of the paths taken by the adults in this study were influenced by: retirement, the need to interact with their child as they rode for therapy, a move to a new location, the death of a spouse, an empty nest, or the smile of a child on the back of a horse. Youth came to HH to volunteer: through the girl scouts, because their friends volunteered at HH, by way of a family member, because of the need for the services provided by HH, or because they were bored and too young get a job. Research question two asked me to gather the personal histories of the volunteers. The past or current professions of the adults were as: a homemaker, a mother, a nurse, an educator, a firefighter, and a sales representative. The youth attended a high school, vocational school, or were home
schooled. Identifying the participants’ perceived benefits from volunteering at HH was research question three, and I found that youth volunteers reported that they could “be themselves” and “not be judged.” I came to view HH as a safe and nurturing environment for the young people involved in volunteering. The youth gained confidence, self-esteem, a feeling of accomplishment, continued their love of horses, became less judgmental, learned to appreciate hard work, and valued their service to their rider/clients. These comments are inclusive to youth with disabilities. The adults found respite, relaxed after a day of work, and enjoyed their interaction with other volunteers, riders, and horses. Research question four charged me to examine the interactions that existed between the volunteers and the HH community which included the riders, staff, and horses. I can only describe these interactions as caring, nurturing, appreciative, supportive, and fun. This list cannot begin to reveal the interactions within the community of HH; only the narratives of the participants can accomplish that. My final research question asked me to determine the contributing factors for sustained volunteering at HH. The answer to this question is linked to the benefits the volunteers identified. These benefits were the result of a sense of community, satisfaction of a job well done in regard to menial barn work, or the sense of helping others less fortunate than themselves. The narrative transcripts revealed that the volunteers linked the benefits they received as a function of their client/rider interactions and the transcript coding associated with this category appeared most often in my analysis followed by a sense of community.

Volunteers in the ranks of NPOs’ self-select to give of their time to a specific agency, and in doing so receive intangible benefits based on their length and level of
involvement. For those NPO’s concerned with volunteer maintenance and sustainability, further narrative examination of this reciprocal relationship needs to be promoted.

The number of female participants in this study (86%) is higher that of the male participants. The HH volunteer director informed me that in general, the number of females volunteering at HH outweighs the number of males, but was unable to suggest a reason for this disparity. The data of the quantitative studies I have referenced, report this gender-specific difference as well. I am not able to make an inference as to this occurrence, but suggest the topic be an area of inquiry for the NPO sector.

I found that HH volunteers shared more similarities than differences. Comparable conclusions were drawn by MacNella (2008), in her study of volunteers within NPO health and social care services in Ireland, “Certain commonalities were noted, including a focus on goals other than direct financial gain and the experience of benefits from volunteer work” (p. 137).

Humans by nature create cultures that on first approximation appear distinctive, but when analyzed for their main components reveal a level of commonality. Although the volunteers arrived at HH by different paths, they shared a culture of language, values, thoughts, and goals. I suggest further inquiry into the concept of NPO culture by examining similar equine-assisted facilities and those NPO’s whose services target different clients. This qualitative methodology may uncover common cultural elements which exist across agencies.

My research provides a starting point for further inquiry into volunteerism in equine-assisted therapy organizations and adds to the body of literature regarding entry
into, and benefits of, volunteering for youth and/or youth with disabilities. HHH serves as an example of the successful inclusiveness of an NPO.

With today’s extensive use of technology, I found it trying at best to convey in writing my experiences at HHH; the sound of brushes whisk-whisking during grooming, the smell of fresh hay and grain in stalls, and the sight of children on their favorite horse that, with the exception of smell, might be communicated through the use of video. With this limitation in mind, the qualitative methods of my research, allowed me to collect data on an experientially personal level as well as being minimally intrusive within the setting. It is through the lens of a participant/observer that I am able to share my explorations with the reader.

Foster (2002) sums up my research goals and experiences in her study of hospice volunteering,

Methodologically, the interactive interviews . . . are grounded in the premise that we can understand . . . through our hearts and not just our minds,. . . . and shed light on. . . communication, by engaging the subjectivity of the reader, giving you [the reader] a glimpse of what it is like to be there and some of the lessons we have learned” (p. 255).
APPENDIXES
APPENDIX A

RESEARCH FORMS
Dear *Helping Hooves* Youth Volunteer,

My name is Joanne Salay, and I am a Graduate Student at Kent State University. My current project is the study of youth volunteers at *Helping Hooves* which has been approved by Kent State University. I want to discover: how you arrived at *Helping Hooves*, your viewpoint of volunteering at the farm, what you see as the benefits of your work to yourself and/or others, why you continue to volunteer at *Helping Hooves*, and any other experiences you consider important and/or interesting to give me a better understanding of your participation at *Helping Hooves*. I believe it is important for others to hear your stories in order to appreciate why you do what you do.

Assisting in this research is completely voluntary on your part and you will remain anonymous in the final report. If you are under the age of 18, you and your parent or guardian must read and sign papers 1 through 4 if you wish to participate in my research. If you are over the age of 18 please complete papers 2 through 4 if you wish to participate. See attached.

1. Letter to Parent or Guardian
2. Informed Consent to Participate in A Research Study – Adult and Youth version
3. Consent Statement and Signature
4. Audiotape Consent Form
5. If you choose to participate please contact me at either 000-000-000 my home, or at 000-000-0000, my mobile, and we can set up an interview time of your convenience. I can collect your forms at that time.

Thank you,

Joanne Salay  
Graduate Researcher  
Kent State University
Dear Parent or Guardian,

Your child has been invited to participate in a research study of youth volunteers. Their participation is entirely voluntary. Since they are under 18 years of age, you and your child must make the decision whether or not to participate.

The purpose of my research is to gather stories of youth volunteer experiences at Helping Hooves. I want to learn how your child arrived at Helping Hooves, how they feel about volunteering, what they see as the benefits of volunteering to themselves and others, why they stay, and other experiences they may want to share. I believe it is important for individuals not involved with Helping Hooves to hear your child’s stories and better understand your child’s involvement in volunteering.

Sincerely,

Joanne Salay
Kent State University
Graduate Student
jksalay@kent.edu
Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Adult and Youth Version

A Narrative Inquiry of Volunteer Experiences

at a Midwestern Equestrian Facility for Individuals with Disabilities

A Masters Thesis by Joanne Salay

You are being invited to participate in a research study of youth volunteers. Your participation is voluntary. It is important that you ask any questions about this research so you can decide whether or not to participate. You will receive a copy of this paper.

*If you are under 18 years of age, you and your parent or guardian must make the decision whether or not to participate.

The purpose of my research is to gather stories of youth volunteer experiences at Helping Hooves. I want to learn how you arrived at Helping Hooves, how you feel about volunteering, what you see as the benefits of volunteering, why you stay, and other experiences you may want to share. I believe it is important for others to hear your stories so they can better understand why you do what you do.

There are no risks to you in this research and you will not be personally identified in the report except for age and gender. After word processing your audio-taped interview, the tapes will be erased, and in the Word document you will have a different name. Your signed consent form will be kept in a secure location on campus with no access to it except by me or my advisor.

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, you may contact me, Joanne Salay at 000-000-0000 jksalay@kent.edu or Dr. Tricia Niesz at 000-000-0000 tniesz@kent.edu. This research has been approved by the Kent State University Institutional Review Board (IRB). If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or complaints about the research, you may call the IRB at 330-672-2704.
Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Adult and Youth Version

A Narrative Inquiry of Volunteer Experiences at a Midwestern Equestrian Facility

for Individuals with Disabilities

Consent Statement and Initials

I have read this consent form and have had the opportunity to have my questions answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I have received a copy of this document for future reference.

I am under the age of 18.

__________________________  ____________________________
Date                       Parent Signature

__________________________  ____________________________
Date                       Volunteer Signature

I am over the age of 18.

__________________________  ____________________________
Date                       Volunteer Signature

*If you change your mind at any time and do not wish to have your story included in this research, please contact Joanne Salay 000-000-0000
Audiotape Consent Form

A Narrative Inquiry of Volunteer Experiences at a Midwestern Equestrian Facility for Individuals with Disabilities

A Masters Thesis by Joanne Salay  jksalay@kent.edu

I agree to have my interview of my volunteer experiences audio taped.

_____ Yes  _____No  (Check One)

I have the opportunity to hear the audiotapes of my interview. I want to:

_____ not hear the tapes  ____hear the tapes

I have heard the tapes ______________________________

Signature

Joanne Salay (researcher) _____ may use _____ may not use (Check One) the audiotapes of me for:

_____ this research project  ____presentation at professional meetings (Check choice/s)

I understand that I will not be personally identified.

_____ Yes  _____No  (Check One)

I am under the age of 18.

_________________________  __________________________
Date  Parent Signature

_________________________  __________________________
Date  Volunteer Signature

I am over the age of 18.

_________________________
Date  Volunteer Signature
APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
Note: not all questions were asked of all volunteers

1. Please give me an idea of what you do when volunteering at HH.
2. How did you arrive at HH? How long have you been here?
3. What made you decide to volunteer? – [If a previous client] – explain how you felt when you became a volunteer and no longer a rider.
4. How does your volunteering help HH?
5. Can you describe a time/s when volunteering had a positive effect on you?
6. Please tell me of a time when you were volunteering that meant the most to you?
7. What do you see as the characteristics of a volunteer?
8. What effect does your volunteering have on the people you help at HH?
9. In what way/s have volunteering been personally helpful to you?
10. Have you shared your volunteer experiences with another individual – if so what was the occasion?
11. Describe how you personally see yourself at HH.
12. Think about the HH staff and the other volunteers. How do you think your volunteering affects them?
13. Can you describe any negative effects of volunteering at HH?
14. How do you see your volunteering efforts changing the image of individuals your age?
   [youth]
15. Have you volunteered anywhere else, if so, describe your experiences.
16. Have any of your family members volunteered? – Describe their experiences.
17. After a day of volunteering at HH, how do you feel?
18. What does it take to be a volunteer?
19. In your opinion, how do you see your volunteering activities making a difference at HH?
REFERENCES


*Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly, 33*(1), 55-73.


