

Charity foundation helps equestrians who are sick, injured

12:00 a.m. Thursday, Sept. 3, 2015 | Filed in: **News**

The equestrian life is one of risk. No animal is completely predictable. Trainer Tara Celentano wasn't joyriding or jumping a 6-foot fence in late December of 2006. She was simply bringing a young horse back into the barn. The horse spooked and Celentano ended up facedown in the paddock, unable to move. In one shattering moment, the life she'd worked so hard to build was forever changed.

The then 31-year-old became a quadriplegic as a result of her injuries. She was no longer able to bathe or dress herself, let alone work with the horses she loves so much. Luckily, the Wellington-based nonprofit Equestrian Aid Foundation (www.equestrianaidfoundation.org) stepped in to help. EAF helps Celentano stay in her own home in Colts Neck, N.J. She's so grateful that she's speaking out in the hopes that her story will inspire people to support EAF.



Tara Celentano on the autoambulator, a treadmill that supports body weight and allows paralyzed people to go through the motions of walking. Celentano was injured after falling off a horse in 2006. She gets assistance from the Equestrian Aid Foundation, which helps pay for housing, some therapy and living costs. Photo provided by EAF

“I was at their benefit in January,” Celentano said. “When they were talking about the foundation, there were a lot of people in the crowd that weren’t paying attention. I think it’s because no one who benefits from EAF was up talking to them about the difference it makes in their lives. Watching it was kind of discouraging. It’s nice that people are there, for sure, buying the tickets and participating in the auction, but I think it would raise more money if people could see what that money goes towards and how it affects different people.”

EAF was founded in 1996 as a way for equestrians to help those in the industry suffering from HIV/AIDS. It evolved into an organization that assists horse people with

catastrophic illnesses and injuries. Many equestrians don't qualify for federal disability benefits if they are injured, Celentano included.

"They do a lot for me," she said. "They cover expenses that my insurance doesn't cover. They keep me out of a nursing home. Not having to live in an assisted-living facility means a lot to people emotionally. I'm only 40. It's devastating to go into a place like that at such a young age."

At first, Celentano was reluctant to ask for help. Janise Gray, EAF's director of Grant Recipient Services, insisted that Celentano apply for assistance. She kept urging until Celentano finally agreed.

"You already lose so much when you get injured like that," Celentano said. "You don't want to admit that you need help financially. You think you can do everything on your own. It took me a while. She's been great. She keeps in contact with me. I'm very fortunate that she was so persistent."

EAF helps Celentano with everything from housing to massage therapy and specialized exercise equipment to keeping her old wheelchair accessible van in working order. Depending on a nonprofit for your survival is a little precarious. The lives of EAF grant recipients like Celentano rest in the hands of people who donate to the charity

"As long as the funds are there, they can continue to help," Celentano said.

To donate, go online to www.equestrianaidfoundation.org and click on "How You Can Help."

<http://www.palmbeachpost.com/news/news/local/charity-foundation-helps-equestrians-who-are-sick-/nnSpq/>