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GLOBE STAFF PHOTO/TOM LANDERS

At the Dana Hall School, Genesis James, 7, takes a lesson during summer riding camp.

WELLESLEY

## City campers trot, trot in the country

By Rhonda Stewart  
GLOBE STAFF

Mark James watches proudly as his 7-year-old daughter, Genesis, guides her horse around the indoor riding ring at the Dana Hall School. It's the end of Game Day, a series of activities to help summer campers practice mounting the horses, steering, and trotting. It's hard to believe that Genesis started riding, — and first saw a horse, in real life — just four days ago.

"It's all she talks about," her father said. "Many times in the city we don't get this kind of exposure. Kids might only go from home to the basketball court or from home to the corner store, and they only see horses on TV."

Genesis and her friend Nikia Powers are among the first

to participate in City to Saddle, a new program that brings Boston children to Dana Hall for a two-week horseback-riding camp with children from Wellesley. The program, which is funded by private donations, allows city children to learn about riding and caring for horses.

The girls are so small they reach only the middle of the horses, and they need a boost to get into their saddles. But once they're on, they sit up tall and hold their reins confidently. Genesis started the day riding a white-and-brown speckled pony named Blue.

"I started to learn and then I got better," she said. "I asked my mother if we could come back next year."

Program cofounders Kim CAMP, Page 9



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Genesis James (front) gets ready to ride in a lesson with instructor Sara DelVecchio at the Dana Hall School.



Nikia Powers, 7 (right), listens to advice from Sara DelVecchio.

*'Children who bond with the animal and learn to ride not only gain a sense of confidence but responsibility.'*

BARBARA ZENKER  
Program cofounder

# City campers given a taste of riding life in Wellesley

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Summers, an instructor at Dana Hall, and Barbara Zenker, one of her former students, said the venture gives city-dwelling children an opportunity they wouldn't have otherwise. Summers, who started riding at age 6, sees echoes of her own experience in the campers' situation. While growing up in Chatham, she developed a love for horses but didn't have one of her own and did everything from teaching to mucking out stalls to pay her way, so she could participate in competitions.

"I grew up with a family of modest means," she said. "It was very important to me to see that other kids that might've grown up the same way I did had that opportunity."

It's not just a lack of wide open spaces in Boston but the expense that puts riding out of reach for many city children. This is a sport where helmets can cost \$350, custom-made riding boots might be as pricey as \$1,000, and a show pony can cost \$30,000, Summers said.

Normally, it would cost \$650 to attend the camp. But in about three weeks, Summers raised \$3,000 through donations from local Dana Hall supporters to cover the cost of tuition for 8 to 10 city campers over the course of the summer. A local tack shop, Dover Saddlery, donated boots and helmets for the city campers to use.

Summers lives in Medfield and attends the town's First Parish Unitarian Universalist Church, whose sister church is the Bible Way Christian Center in Dorchester. She approached pastor Willie James at the Dorchester church about the program, and a lottery was held to select the campers, 6 to 12 years old.

Willie James, who is Genesis's grandfather, drives the campers to

Instructor Sara DelVecchio said that while Genesis and Nikia were new to riding, they took to it quickly.

"Within an hour, they were hugging the horses, and they just wanted to be around them all the time," she said. "They're like sponges. They're very willing to learn what I teach them."

As much as their riding skill, the campers' friendship is also evident after just a few days together. While they wait their turn for a horse, the girls talk and joke with one another easily.

The students learn about more than just riding. They're also taught about grooming and caring for the horses. The children learn about the different parts of the horse and why horses wear shoes. They might also see a horse being shod by a farrier.

Cofounder Zenker said she and Summers hope they can set up an endowment that would allow city children to return next summer and possibly sometimes during the year. Zenker also hopes the program could inspire similar efforts around the area.

"It's not only fun, but they're responsible for the welfare of the horse. There's this knowledge that this horse cares for me, and I'm going to care for this horse," she said. "Children who bond with the animal and learn to ride not only gain a sense of confidence but responsibility."

As with Genesis, last week was 7-year-old Nikia's first time riding a horse. Now she seems at ease

riding a dark brown pony named Betty, who has become one of her favorites, along with a horse named Freddy. Nikia smiled widely as she finished leading her horse through an obstacle course. She admits she was scared when camp started, but now she has the hang of things.

"You had to put your feet up, and he was shifting back and forth," she said. "I like trotting because it's fun; you get to go up and down. Betty's kind of slow, and Freddy's good at trotting."

Tomorrow, families will be on hand as the campers show off

what they've learned when they put on a horse show.

Nikia's mother, Nikki, hopes her daughter can continue riding horses.

"I would her love to. Every day she comes home with something else," she said. "She's loving it. She's going to be sad when it's over."

For more information on the City to Saddle program, including how to make a donation, call 781-235-3010.

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