

## Teen getting as much out of Giant Steps as those she helps

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Casa Grande sophomore Leah Falsetto works with horses at Giant Steps.

The sound of horses' hooves, the brisk air of the outdoors and, best of all, the smiles and laughter of children. This may sound like a place to escape on a vacation, but it happens to be Giant Steps, a ranch where children with disabilities are able to receive therapy through horseback riding.

Casa Grande High School sophomore Leah Falsetto is a volunteer who helps with sessions at Giant Steps, on Lakeville Highway near Petaluma.

"I started volunteering in ninth grade to complete my hours for Lynne Moquete's community service project and just stuck with it because I really liked it," she said.

Falsetto gains experience with assisting the children at Giant Steps, and she also learns a great deal about horses and how to properly care for them.

"I help the kids when riding the horses because some of the kids aren't able to ride by themselves. I also help lead the horses while the kids ride on them," Falsetto said. "I help the kids while preparing for their classes, during their classes and when they are finished. I help the horses as well as the kids. I tack and untack the horses, groom them and care for them."

Volunteering requires not only a great deal of time and effort, but patience as well. Falsetto realized this as she noticed her schedule was affected by her time put aside to volunteer.

"I used to volunteer twice a week, but now I can only volunteer once a week because of sports and after-school activities," she said. "I plan to continue all the way through high school, although I have to volunteer on and off according to my sports."

Although setting aside time in her schedule to volunteer can be difficult at times, Falsetto enjoys her time at Giant Steps and recognizes the benefits of volunteering not only for herself, but for the children at Giant Steps as well.

"It makes me feel really good," she said. "I love seeing the kids' smiles and the joy on their faces."

It takes great inspiration to give time to others and expect nothing in return, and what motivates Falsetto to continue volunteering at Giant Steps is the joy she sees in the children's faces as well as the joy she receives from knowing that she is helping improve lives.

"When I feel like doing something, I love just getting out there and helping people," she said. "I like knowing that I am helping brighten their day."

An important part of Falsetto's job at Giant Steps revolves around the children attending the sessions, and they are part of the reason why her tasks at the ranch are so enjoyable.

"The kids are so nice," she said. "Most of them have disabilities, and seeing them getting on a horse and having fun makes me happy."

Volunteering is occasionally difficult when having to set aside time to help the community, but the rewards are extremely satisfying.

"I definitely have a tighter schedule and I am busier with volunteering in my life," she said, "but it has made me feel great because I am helping people."

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