

LoveWay offering virtual programming called Barn Buddies for area children

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Associate Editor

When the coronavirus pandemic shut down schools in mid-March, LoveWay Inc. in Middlebury became a very quiet place. Usually during the school year, children from area schools come to LoveWay for class as part of their school day. Other children come in for individual classes in the evenings or Saturday mornings.

In an effort to stay connected with their students, LoveWay staff quickly found a way to offer virtual programming. Called Barn Buddies, these weekly videos offer warm up exercises with Tim Krecsmer, a certified instructor, then a five to 10 minute lesson on all aspects of horses and riding. Lessons are centered around horse nutrition, grooming, tacking and eventually riding. There is even an interactive portion where students can do interactive puzzles, labeling and complete a word search.

Each class has a beginner and advanced work sheets and there's a PDF version so students can print them out and do them together with their parent, or maybe quiz their parents on their horse knowledge.

For the LoveWay team, members were looking for a way to support the special needs community. Executive Director Shelley Becker explained special needs children are very routine oriented. The Barn Buddy classes also support special needs teachers, parents and caregivers.

"We found this is something the entire family is sitting down and doing together," said Becker. "Our group of special education kiddos weren't near ready for e-learning, so our teachers were stressed."

Staff has been getting positive feedback on the program. The first lesson had more than 300 views while the second lesson had more than 200 views. At press time, LoveWay had just released the fourth lesson.

The first lesson reviewed grooming and parts of the horse. The second lesson reviewed parts of the tack. The third lesson reviewed tacking in sequence in preparation for a ride. In a typical LoveWay class, students do as much of the tacking process as they are able with assistance from volunteers. The first lesson reviewed horse nutrition.

Future Barn Buddy lessons include going through horsemanship, the horse's gaits and going on a trail ride.

Becker said Barn Buddies is a program that can continue when regular classes can start again. It can provide a carry over during Christmas break as well as the summer.

LoveWay works with 17 schools in northern Indiana and southern Michigan with a waiting list. Those schools on the waiting list will be encouraged to implement the Barn Buddy program as it will assist their students in being familiar with horses, the barn and the equipment when they are actually able to come and ride.

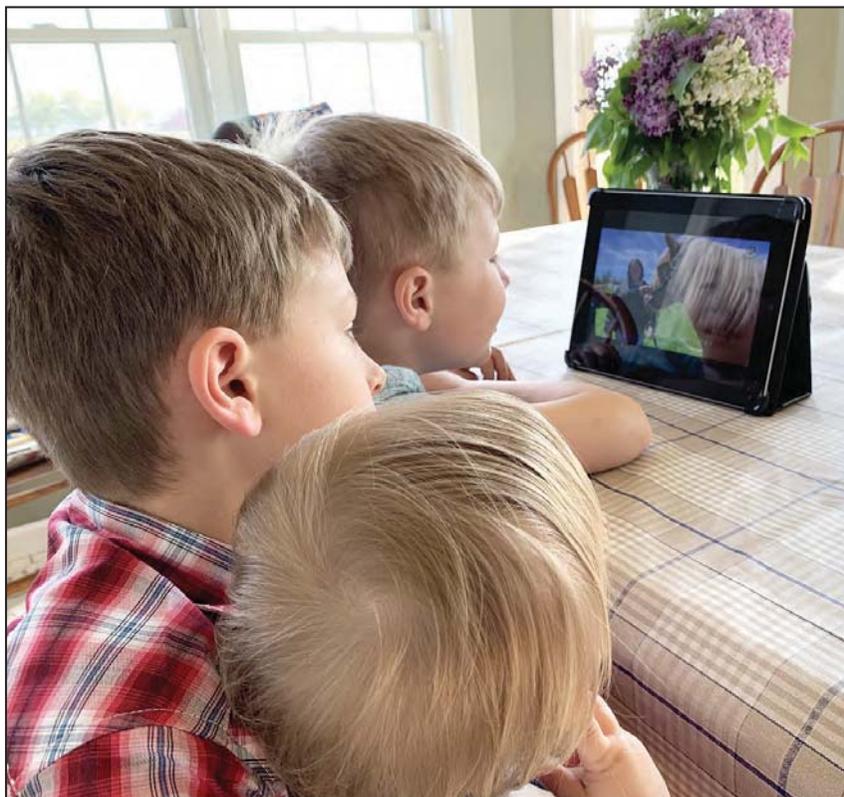
The program is totally LoveWay driven. "We found staff had skills that we didn't know about," Becker said. LoveWay staff have stepped up and done everything from prepping the web site to shooting the videos and selecting different LoveWay horses to "star" in the videos.

The shutdown hasn't just been hard on LoveWay students but on the staff as well. "I think it (the new virtual program) has brought out the best in everyone," Becker said.

"We're very blessed. We put out a plea to get a Mac Pro and Go Pro camera and someone funded those," Becker said.

Currently, LoveWay is looking for support while continuing to serve its students in the best way possible. "Even with COVID ... We still need to feed the horses," Becker said.

Currently LoveWay's plan is a phases approach to bringing students back. Becker said it will probably start with individual



LEARNING ABOUT HORSES — Caden Cunningham and his siblings watch a Barn Buddies virtual lesson put on by LoveWay Inc. LoveWay staff found a way to offer virtual classes to its students. The classes cover a variety of horse related topics and are interactive as well. Photo provided.

classes to make sure there are good procedures in place to prepare and clean up between students. She hopes to be able to do that yet this summer.

The Barn Buddies program can be accessed through LoveWay's website, lovewayinc.org, click on the bar across the front that says virtual programming. Barn Buddies is free.

STAYING CONNECTED — LoveWay student Elijah Mast keeps up with the staff and horses at LoveWay through a Barn Buddies class. LoveWay staff created the Barn Buddy classes when area schools shut down due to the corona virus. Photo provided.

