

Work To Ride

by Virginia Butler

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According to the United States Polo Association, the typical polo player is a 40-year-old, white-collar worker with an average income of \$174,000. Except of course those players in Lezlie Hiner's Work to Ride program.

In 1994, Hiner founded WTR in Philadelphia, a non-profit intervention program that uses horses and horse sports to engage at-risk teenagers to participate in constructive activities ... specifically polo.

Most of the participants are poor black children, some who have been in trouble with the law and who have no direction at home. Although their socio-economic status sets them apart from most polo players, they are still required to have the same self-discipline as other polo players.

WTR kids must maintain a C average in school, participate in twice-weekly practices, and look after 35 horses, their stables and their equipment.

The Work to Ride program is designed to give kids the opportunity to develop social and educational skills they will apply throughout life. Hiner says her players learn kindness through feeding, grooming and nurturing the horses. Upon acceptance into the program, players are expected to commit to a minimum of one year of playing for Work to Ride, assuming they will remain a part of the team until graduation from high school. Players can continue to be a part of the program even after graduation by becoming a mentor.

Hiner works with Philadelphia local schools, social service agencies, and community action organizations to recruit Work to Ride participants. The program accepts at-risk male and female students between ages of 7 and 18 who have been referred. Since the program started, it has provided a safe learning outlet for over 400 individuals.

Provide activities that promote discipline, self-esteem, motivation, social development, life skills, academic achievement and physical fitness.

- Provide year-round programs that encourage long term participation.
- Provide educational and cultural resources to participants and community.
- Provide vocational guidance and opportunities for careers in related fields.