

# Struggling Sacramento-area nonprofits team up to stay afloat

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For nearly 15 years, Ride & Shine offered disabled children and adults the chance to build physical and emotional strength by working with horses in El Dorado County.

Then the economy tanked.

Donations plummeted. Feed and veterinary costs skyrocketed. Clients cut back on what they could pay for services.

This summer, with bills piling up, the nonprofit group's board of directors pondered closing. Instead, they turned to another

charity with similar goals, and found new life.

Ride & Shine is now part of the Grace Foundation, a horse rescue organization based in El Dorado Hills.

"We were in bad shape, but we just didn't want to let this program go," board member Ed Kaufmann said. "Grace seemed like a perfect fit."

Across the region and the state, as nonprofit groups struggle to stay afloat, many are turning to one another for survival. Collaborations, partnerships and mergers are becoming more and more common, said Ann Lucas, executive director of the Nonprofit Resource Center in Sacramento.

"It's the new reality," Lucas said. "People are having to find new ways to be efficient and effective with less money, and these alliances are part of that."

When Wonder Inc., a mentoring program for foster youth, was having trouble meeting expenses because of state budget cuts and a drop in donations last year, it approached Sierra Adoption Services, now known as Sierra Forever Families. Sierra acquired Wonder in July.

"We are one of the organizations that has remained economically healthy, so we were happy to be able to assist another group that helps families," said Sierra spokeswoman Sara Hanson. "It's worked out very well for both of us."

"There are more than 6,000 nonprofits in our area, and many of them service the same



Ryan Koehler, 7, gets a boost onto a horse from riding instructor Erin Kielty at the nonprofit Grace Ranch. The Grace Foundation, a horse rescue organization in El Dorado Hills, recently took in Ride & Shine, a smaller nonprofit that gave disabled children and adults a chance to work with horses but had hit hard times.



Ryan tries his hand at grooming a horse.



Brittany Bier, 14, of El Dorado Hills, walks one of the Grace Foundation's rescued horses while training in a youth leadership program at the ranch.

segment of people," Hanson said. "So it makes sense that we would work together on ways to share resources and collaborate."

For Women's Empowerment, which helps homeless women find housing and jobs, partnerships "are central to the way we do everything," said spokeswoman Amber Stott. "We don't want to duplicate services that already are available in the community, so we look for groups with shared missions."

Women's Empowerment works with the nonprofit Rudolf Steiner College to provide parenting classes; with CARES for HIV education and testing; and with UC Davis Extension for classes in nutrition and cooking, among many other partners, Stott said.

Before aligning with Grace, Ride & Shine was suffocating from a combination of declining donations and increasing costs, said board member Marlene Price. "We were operating month to month, trying to pull everything together," she said. "Looking at the long range, we did not see things getting much better. So to keep things intact, we really had to reach out."

The Grace Foundation has suffered the effects of the shaky economy as well but pays no rent at its ranch, which sits on 600 acres owned by developer Angelo K. Tsakopoulos. Grace was able to absorb the smaller Ride & Shine with few complications, said Beth DeCaprio.

Ride & Shine horses, staff members and supplies have moved to the ranch in El Dorado Hills, and the smaller group's board of directors will advise the Grace board. Ride & Shine clients will be able to take advantage of Grace's educational, counseling and other programs.

Julie McBride, director of programs for Grace, said Ride & Shine brings something to the table, too. "We're just starting our fourth year, so our program is very new and very small. Ride & Shine had some years behind it and a wonderful reputation, so we're all excited about this.

"It's a necessity in these times for nonprofits to come together and support each other," she said. "We're more powerful when we work together."

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