

Treasures of Heaven Riding Camp for Special-Needs Kids

Yoshi and Fran Ichijo
August 4, 2013



Camp Coordinators (from left to right) Christina Ellanson and Carlina Ichijo, seated on their respective mothers (from left to right) Lesa Ellanson and Fran Ichijo

One of the Unification movement's best-kept secrets is an innovative riding camp for children with special needs that has been going strong for seven years at the New Hope Equestrian Facility in Port Jervis, N.Y.



Camper Heran Mouada riding Ned the horse.

From Aug. 1-4, 2013, 10 families and 24 young Unificationist volunteers came together for a transformational weekend. Yoshi and Fran Ichijo, longtime Unificationists in Poolesville, MD, have pioneered a way for blessed families who care for children with disabilities, whom they call "Treasure of Heaven," to watch their kids get the thrill of riding, find solace and comfort, meaning in their challenges, even to find a marriage partner for their child, and generally deal with the day-to-day struggles of dealing with a difficult situation. The Ichijo's serve as the National Coordinators of the Treasures of Heaven Ministry, which recently incorporated as a nonprofit, The Treasures of Heaven, Inc., to serve families in and outside the Unification community.



Parents' discussion led by Fran and Yoshi Ichijo

During this weekend, with two young Unificationist volunteers for every Treasure of Heaven child, the kids did fun activities together, with a wonderful horse-back riding component, while the parents talked in a large, elegant room sharing their hearts, tears, joys and successes. Some parents were impressed with the idealism of the second-generation volunteers, some of whom skipped the Blessed Culture and Sports Fest in order to help the riding camp. This unique camp is largely possible through the generosity of Lesa and Lowell Ellanson, caretakers of the farm, who go to great lengths to prepare the facility. The only problem is that little is known about the ministry and more weekends need to be dedicated to this program, throughout the country as there are many more families to reach and help.



Lesa and Lowell Ellanson, Caretakers of New Hope Farms Equestrian Park

The beautiful thing is that the helpers have a deep experience assisting the kids with disabilities. They were called “Treasures of Heaven” (TOH) kids by Rev. Hyung Jin Moon, former Unification Church International President, and the name stuck. Some of the kids can barely tie their shoes, or go to the bathroom by themselves. In helping someone so helpless, the Unificationists find a deep place to connect with God, a living Divine Principle workshop, based on practical application of True Father’s motto, “live for the sake of others.”



Camper Tony Lehrer (seated atop Blackie Ellason, the horse) accompanied by volunteers (from left) Meena Okamoto, Yuki Jones, Luke Scazzero, Lisa Scazzero, Meta Learey and camper George Peterson.

The TOH kids have feelings, long for love and acceptance just like “normal” kids. In their young lives so far, they often have been shunned, teased, or forgotten, with few friends and have been largely misunderstood. The young Unificationist mentors show them love, compassion, and total acceptance, which culminates in a Saturday evening of entertainment where each team of three (two mentors and one TOH kid) puts on a skit, a poem or work of art created by them by using the skills, taste and beauty of the TOH child. All of the kid activities were coordinated by Christina Ellanson and Carlina Ichijo Ellanson. This year, the entertainment was particularly creative, which included an erupting volcano, a king, and Lego antics.

The parents met in the elegant club room where Father Moon often sat with his family, and many shed tears as they shared their touching stories. One mother who came for the first time said that the pain she had carried somewhere in her heart was washed away at the camp. They also made plans for the future, based on the new official non-profit status of the Treasure of Heaven, Inc., accomplished this spring by outgoing President Carol Matsuuchi. They held breakout sessions to plan the building of a future group home, to discuss how to do outreach within the Unification movement, which activities could be implemented at this point in time, and plans for next year’s camp.



Unificationist-born youths, worked as a volunteers at the camp

The official new board of directors was voted in, and the new President, Mr. Yoshi Ichijo, was nominated and voted in. The new Secretary/Treasurer is Carol Matsuuchi and the other three board members are Frances Ichijo, Lesa Ellanson, and Masako Feddema. The board will meet annually face to face and via webinar as needed. The eventual hope is to have a community where we have a group home, run by second gen Unificationists who have experience in the field of Special Needs. The board is looking for a young Unificationist who has desire to work in this field or who is already trained to run day programs and coordinate federal and state resources available.



The Main Stable at the New Hope Farms Equestrian Park in Port Jervis, New York

Having a large endowment or unlimited revenue would help in this quest, of course. The group is open to all ideas to accomplish their goal. They would, of course, love to establish a group home and riding facility for the handicapped at New Hope Farms, ideally suited for that purpose.



View from inside the stable

The riding camp is truly a community effort drawing on many hands and feet, and truly we felt the presence of God and our True Parents the entire weekend.