



When our daughter Sophia was only ten years old, she was diagnosed with an ultra-rare neurodegenerative condition, one that causes intellectual disability, movement disorder, epilepsy, and sleep disturbances. This condition causes your loved one to lose the ability to speak or communicate effectively, and over time, will worsen so that eventually, your child will lose the ability to walk, swallow, and regulate other bodily functions. The doctor concludes by saying that he is sorry —no treatment options or cures are available for this disorder.

We had been on a diagnostic odyssey for ten years before our daughter's diagnosis and all the while, we were navigating the unknown. Inspiration Ranch had been there to support our daughter and offer us hope and a sense of belonging.

Eleven years ago, when we brought our daughter to Inspiration Ranch, she was six years old and was still struggling to maintain her balance. She had only learned to walk three years earlier at the age of three. Before we started this new chapter in our lives with the Ranch, we were usually having to hover over Sophia or put a helmet on her head to protect her as she fell often. Her core was weak, so her preferred position was sitting stationary on the floor.

I knew I needed to find another way to encourage Sophia to keep moving forward. I watched a news segment on TV featuring the Ranch and something called Equine Assisted Therapy. I saw kids who looked like my Sophia sitting tall on these huge horses, and I listened to the trainer as she spoke about all the benefits of equine therapy.

When you see Sophia ride, you can see her confidence as she taps her horse's side with her left foot when asked to "walk on". As her silhouette moves around the arena, you can see her upright posture that showcases the strength in her core muscles, further evidenced by her head that no longer bobbles aimlessly as it once did. She now walks safely and independently and can even climb stairs with assistance.

Today, Sophia is a senior in high school and Inspiration Ranch has been essential to her progress and development. They fill my cup with kindness and words of encouragement, which, on tough days, give me the fuel needed to make it through the week.