



*Stevi Anne Thompson*

Despite the challenge of a severe anxiety disorder, this young rider is thriving in the show ring, thanks in part to the USHJA Foundation “Making A Dream” Grant Program.

## The ‘Making A Dream’ Team

The USHJA Foundation thanks all of those individuals and companies that generously donated goods and services to the “Making A Dream” Grant Program on behalf of Stevi Anne Thompson, including but not limited to:

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# Horses Open Many Doors for Stevi Anne Thompson

By Tricia Booker

When 16-year-old Stevi Anne Thompson walks into the show ring aboard her appendix Quarter Horse Quintessential, she’s the picture of confidence, tackling hunter and equitation courses and walking out with championships.

What many people don’t know, however, is that Stevi has overcome more than most young riders to achieve these stellar performances: She’s battled an anxiety disorder since she was a small child, but thanks to horses, she’s winning in and out of the arena.

“If it hadn’t been for riding, I just don’t know where she’d be,” said Stevi’s mother, Melanie Thompson. “She has a severe anxiety disorder where she has phobias and has panic attacks. It’s amazing to know her background and issues and then see her compete. With horses, she gets into her own world and blocks everything else out.”

Due to the disorder, Stevi, of Statesboro, Georgia, left middle school in sixth grade and entered a home-school program for three years. It was during this time that her doctor suggested riding as a form of therapy. Slowly, with the help of horses, she’s returned to school and is improving in all aspects of her life.

“When she had these episodes she’d just shut down, but if she knew she could go to the barn she’d be OK,” said Melanie. “She’s battled anxiety with her riding, but her trainer is very supportive and works with her. Horses have really brought her a long way, and she gets along so well with them. She really has a way with them.”

After four years of lessons and training with Sara Bryan at Millcreek Ponies, Stevi attended her first A-rated horse shows in 2012, earning top ribbons and championships in the Pre-Children’s section at the Aiken Winter Classic, March

Madness II and the Charleston Summer Classic horse shows in South Carolina.

It was last summer when Melanie noticed information about the “Making A Dream” Grant Program on the USHJA website and decided to nominate her daughter. Stevi was awarded the 2013 grant and traveled to the FTI Consulting Winter Equestrian Festival in Wellington, Florida, in February for two weeks of training and showing.

“The ‘Making A Dream’ Program is giving me an opportunity I never thought I could have,” said Stevi. “Going to Palm Beach and training with trainers and riders I look up to is a dream come true.

“Riding has always been difficult for me because of my anxiety, but I knew this is something I wanted to do. Back in 2011, I went down and watched WEF for a weekend. As soon as I got there, I knew I belonged there,” she added.

Stevi, now a junior at Portal High School, plans to continue riding and working with horses in the future and would enjoy riding on a college team.

“We’re not in a financial situation to show at WEF, so this was a wonderful opportunity,” said Melanie. “We do as much as we can because we feel that riding and showing has made a big difference in her anxiety. Some people on the outside will ask, ‘How do you do this, [with] the expense?’ You have to be on the other side to understand.”

Melanie hopes the “Making A Dream” grant and Stevi’s experiences in Florida will help her to strive toward further dreams and goals with horses, riding and beyond.

“An anxiety disorder isn’t something she can control, and it’s overpowering at times,” explained Melanie. “Riding and working with horses is her calling in life, and I want her to see that she can make it—nothing is impossible.”