



Beyond the Classroom Walls

Innovative Approaches to Animal-Assisted Education in Schools and Communities by Le Petit Ranch 501c3

11 February 2026

Marjorie Borreda-Martinez

Founder & President of Le Petit Ranch



LE PETIT RANCH
• ANIMAL-ASSISTED ACTIVITIES •

An early passion for care and animals

Born in France to parents of Spanish origin, I dreamed of becoming a vet.

However, after earning my Master's degree, life led me to a **15-year career in Digital Marketing (L'Oréal, Dannon, Logitech).**

While my career took me around the world, living in places like South Korea, India, and Switzerland, I remained committed to giving back. I volunteered at Bideawee Animal Shelter in NYC, worked with children suffering from polio in India, and helped build schools in Africa.

Always surrounded by animals, I adopted two cats from a Brooklyn shelter and **rescued two Spanish greyhounds, raising awareness for the plight of Spanish Galgos.**



Marjorie Borreda-Martinez

Founder & President of Le Petit Ranch



A New Beginning

In 2023, after experiencing burnout, I decided to pursue my passion for animals and care.

I completed a 240-hour certification in Animal-Assisted Therapy & Coaching in Switzerland, earning my swiss Animal-Assisted Therapist diploma in 2024, along with the US certification in Horse Powered Reading®. I also became one of the first Europeans certified by AAAIP as an Animal-Assisted Interventions Specialist, specializing in senior care and child education.

Since 2024, I have been leading weekly Animal-Assisted Activities in schools, nursing homes, libraries, communities centers and more.

Me and my family returned to the Berkshires in March 2025. Excited to give back to Sheffield, where my husband grew up, I built Le Petit Ranch 501(c)3 in Sheffield.



What is Le Petit Ranch?



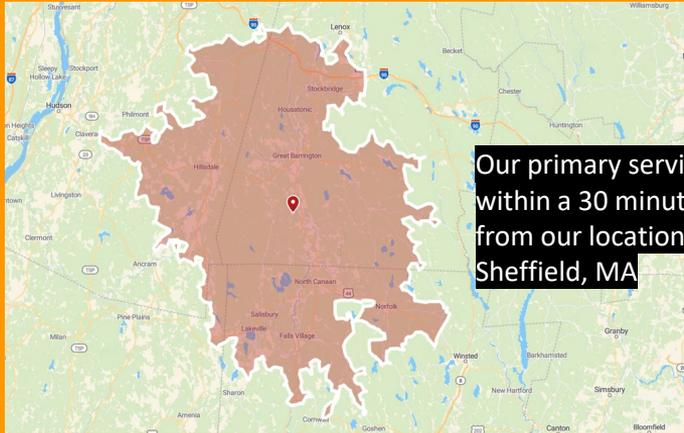
Mission

Le Petit Ranch is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization dedicated to fostering **well-being, learning, and community connection** through animal-assisted activities.

Vision

We envision a world where **the unique bond between humans and animals fosters emotional resilience, combats loneliness, and creates opportunities for personal growth and joyful connections**, empowering individuals of all ages and abilities to lead fulfilling lives.

What do we offer?



LE PETIT RANCH
- ANIMAL-ASSISTED ACTIVITIES -

Our programs

combine **animal connection and social-emotional learning** through sessions with **miniature horses, guinea pigs, chickens, and rescue greyhounds.**

We serve seniors, youth, individuals of all abilities, and caregivers.

We offer on-site visits and off-site outreach to schools, daycare, libraries, community centers, nursing homes, senior residences and senior centers.

Onsite

At the heart of the Ranch is our **sensory-friendly indoor classroom, designed for learners of all abilities and ages and inclusive education.** Our space is calm and welcoming. We believe in connection without words, building bridges between people and animals.

Though young (2024), we've built trusted community partnerships, received 5-star reviews, and are committed to growing with heart, purpose, and a **deep belief that everyone deserves to feel safe, seen, connected, comfortable and celebrated.**

The Ladies

Yayi & Ronya



LE PETIT RANCH
- ANIMAL-ASSISTED ACTIVITIES -

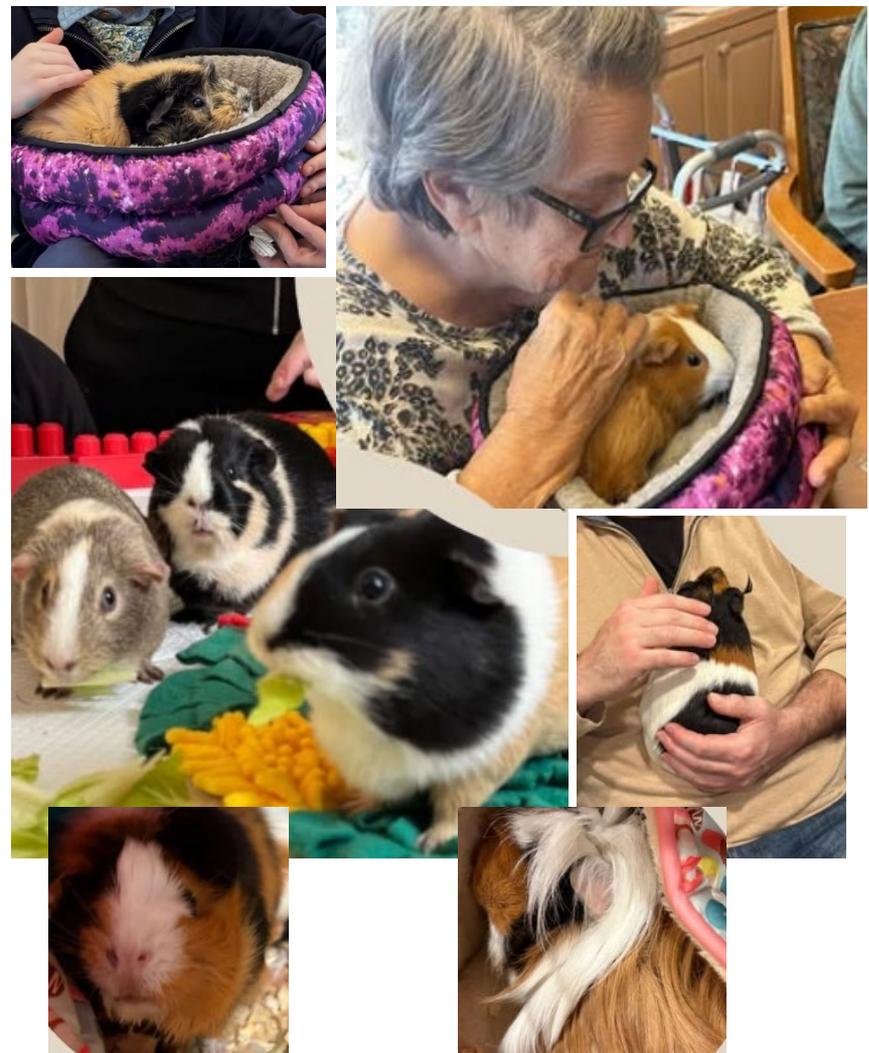


The Piggie Crew

MaryBel, MaryLou, MarySol
Cutie Petootie & Munchkin
PomPom
Priscilla & Rosalie



LE PETIT RANCH
- ANIMAL-ASSISTED ACTIVITIES -

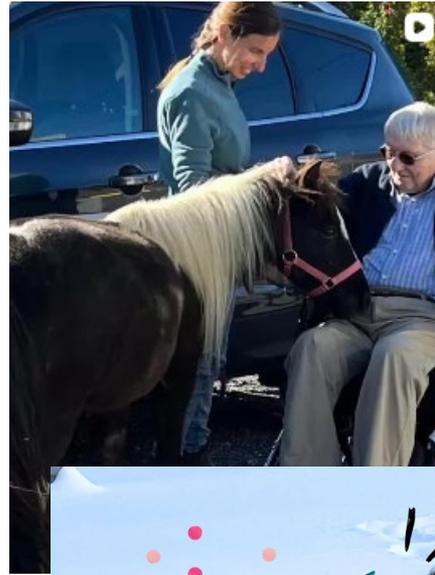


The Horses Gang

Mini Mac, Miso & Rocket



LE PETIT RANCH
- ANIMAL-ASSISTED ACTIVITIES -



The Chick team

The -ette



LE PETIT RANCH
- ANIMAL-ASSISTED ACTIVITIES -



Today's topic



Shares how **animal-assisted interventions** can support **Emotional Regulation, Academic Growth, Social Connection** in school and community settings.

This presentation highlights a variety of **real-life, movement-based, and multilingual activities** that foster learning through connection.

Across emotional regulation, academic growth, and social connection, the data tells a consistent story: **Animal-Assisted interventions help us build them faster and more safely.**

While some of the data is county-wide, **my work is focused specifically in Southern Berkshire (and some of my earlier work in Switzerland)** and what we see locally aligns strongly with broader trends.



Agenda

- Our Community Needs
- Our Philosophy
- Our Programming
- Insights & Data

1

Our Community Needs



LE PETIT RANCH
- ANIMAL-ASSISTED ACTIVITIES -

Community Need in Southern Berkshire

Emotional Regulation

What the Local Data Tells Us

- While Southern Berkshire includes comparatively higher-income towns, **child stress and mental health needs cut across income levels**, particularly post-COVID.
- The Berkshire Community Assessment identifies **mental health and substance use as top regional needs**, with impacts felt county-wide, including Southern Berkshire families accessing services outside their town
- Rural geography, transportation limits, and service gaps create **barriers to early, preventive emotional support**, especially for children.

Why This Matters Locally

- Educators report students who are academically capable but **emotionally dysregulated**.
- Families often seek support *after* challenges escalate not before.

Even in communities that appear resourced, emotional regulation remains a universal need especially for children navigating stress, transitions, and uncertainty.



We often start our sessions with some Yoga, breathing exercises and sharing about our feelings

Community Need in Southern Berkshire

Academic Growth Requires Emotional Readiness

What the Local Data Tells Us

- Berkshire County graduation rates are strong, but **stress, anxiety, and disengagement** continue to affect learning readiness.
- Housing instability, food insecurity, and family stress, even when less visible, **directly affect student focus and persistence**, including in Southern Berkshire.
- Community conversations emphasize that **learning barriers are often emotional, not intellectual**.

Why This Matters Locally

- Southern Berkshire schools **value enrichment and innovation but enrichment works best when students feel safe and regulated**.
- **Animal-assisted education supports:**
 - **Focus and sustained attention**
 - **Willingness to participate**
 - **Confidence in learning spaces**

Academic growth isn't just about rigor, it's about readiness. Emotional readiness is what allows rigor to land.



We offer French Language introduction with animals to Kindergarten classes to open their mind to other cultures and semantics.

Community Need in Southern Berkshire

Social Connection in Schools & Communities

What the Local Data Tells Us

- Rural and small-town communities face **increased social isolation**, especially for:
 - Children with anxiety or special needs
 - Families new to the region
 - Older adults
- The Community Assessment highlights the need for **relationship-based, coordinated supports**, not siloed services

Why This Matters Locally

- Schools and community spaces in Southern Berkshire often serve as **primary hubs of connection**.
- **Animal-assisted programs:**
 - **Reduce social barriers**
 - **Create shared, welcoming experiences**
 - **Support intergenerational and community engagement**

In small communities, belonging matters and animals help people feel like they belong faster and share common grounds.



Mixed-age groups participating in our Animal-Assisted sessions as part of an After-school program at a public school.

2

Our Philosophy



Safety + Comfort first

Curiosity is only possible once safety and comfort are established. - Andy Booth

Core Principle : Curiosity is not a starting point — it is an outcome.

- In horsemanship, learning only emerges *after* safety and comfort are established.
- The same progression applies to children, classrooms, and communities.

How This Shows Up in Our Work

- **Safety**
 - Predictable environments (our classroom at the Ranch or their space at school) for the participants but also for the animals.
 - Calm, nonjudgmental presence (partner animals but also volunteers)
 - Clear expectations and boundaries (animal welfare first)
- **Comfort**
 - Regulated nervous systems for partner animals (check or signs of stress, mostly free or always access to hideout) and participants (yoga and breathing experience)
 - Trust in the space and the experience (access to water, food and shelter at all times, flexible seating and warmth)
 - Permission to engage at one's own pace (no contact forced, flexible seating, liberty for animals, flexible program)



What's new in our space this season:

- ✦ An expanded book selection including veterinary medicine books for kids and Spanish titles
- ✦ More areas and tools dedicated to feelings, emotions, and self-regulation exercises
- ✦ Electric blankets to keep everyone warm and comfortable
- ✦ New craft storage to support even more creativity
- ✦ Our Friendship Wall with the names of our animals and a place to leave kindness notes

And always...

- 🪑 Different types of seating
 - 🧺 Blankets
 - 🧩 Fidget toys
 - 📖 Color-coded instructions
 - 🧱 Building Legos
- ...so every child can find what helps their body and brain feel ready to learn.

Safety + Comfort = Curiosity

Curiosity is only possible once safety and comfort are established. - Andy Booth

What does curiosity mean for us

- **Willingness to explore** (fantasy or reality, out of comfort zone, from the point of view of the animals, introduction to new cultures and histories, vulnerability and emotions)
- **Participation in learning** (movements, play-based, sensory, activity sheets to bring home, intergenerational and siblings, bottom-up teaching from kids to grown-ups)
- **Social connection and engagement** (intergenerational, animals as a common ground, multi-lingual)



✦ Because sometimes a child can say a lot to an unicorn ❤️ ✨ 🌈

It might look like just imagination...but fantasy animals like unicorns can be a powerful part of animal-assisted activities.

In our sessions, children don't only connect with real animals, they also connect with magical ones.

When a child talks about a unicorn, they are often:

🌈 Exploring bravery, kindness, or strength through a magical character

🌸 Calming their nervous system through play and imagination

✦ Allowing themselves to feel wonder, which reduces stress

Imagination gives children a soft place to put big feelings.

Fantasy + real animals = emotional safety, confidence, and connection.

Why This Matters for Schools & Communities

- We often ask for **curiosity (learning, behaviour, participation) *before* safety and comfort** exist and then wonder why learning doesn't stick.
- **Animal-assisted education naturally prioritizes safety and comfort first, creating the conditions where curiosity can emerge.**
- Animal-assisted education works across emotional regulation, academic growth, and social connection **by honouring the order the nervous system needs for both participants and partner animals.**



3

Real-Life Examples



Youth Programming in school, after-school and at the Ranch

To support emotional regulation, academic growth and social connection



BONJOUR LES CHIENS

LEARNING TO COUNT WITH TREATS

FRENCH

Écrite les mots en français en suivant les tracés gris.

HOW TO SAY MERCI

TO PRACTICE AT HOME

French Immersion



FIELD TRIP

Field Trip & Summer Camp



LE PETIT RANCH
ANIMAL ASSISTED ACTIVITIES

Animal-Assisted Education at Undermountain Elementary School

Program Overview
Le Petit Ranch (501c)(3) is proud to bring animal-assisted education to the Kindergarten and 1st Grade classes at Undermountain Elementary School this Fall with the support of 5 great sponsors: UME PTO, Bilmar Veterinary Services and NBT Bank.

These joyful, hands-on workshops partner with chickens, dogs, guinea pigs and miniature horses support science, literacy, and social-emotional learning (SEL).

Kindergarten

Chickenologie 101: Learn about chicken breeds, eggs, and biology.

Dog Bite Prevention: Teach dog safety, confidence, and respect.

Mini Vet Clinic: Hands-on animal care, anatomy & empathy, including real vet tool donations (stethoscopes, bandages...)

Field Trip at the Ranch: 2 classes visiting the animals on-site and working with miniature horses.

1st Grade

Chickenologie 101: Learn about chicken breeds, eggs, and biology.

Dog Escape Room: Work on story-driven puzzle-solving with our partner dogs and foster team building and collaboration.

Thanks to our sponsors for helping us empower young learners with kindness, curiosity, and animal knowledge.

Sponsored by Bilmar Veterinary Services, NBT Bank and UME PTO.

BILMAR **NBT BANK** info@lepetitranch.com | www.lepetitranch.com

1 program is neither sponsored nor endorsed by Southern Berkshire Regional School District.

Monthly Curriculum

Youth Programming in libraries and community centers

To support emotional regulation, academic growth and social connection



Guinea Pig Gratitude



Outreach Animal-Assisted Storytime

LE PETIT RANCH
ANIMAL-ASSISTED ACTIVITIES

Scanville
MEMORIAL LIBRARY

HORSE BOOK CAMP

Where Literacy Meets Animal-Assisted Learning

ENTERING GRADES 4-6

22-26 JUNE 2026
9.30AM-11.30AM

Free for families
Sponsored by The Friends of The Library

Horse Book Club

Senior Programming

To support emotional regulation and social connection

Connecting Generations
Through Animal-Assisted
Activities 🐾❤️



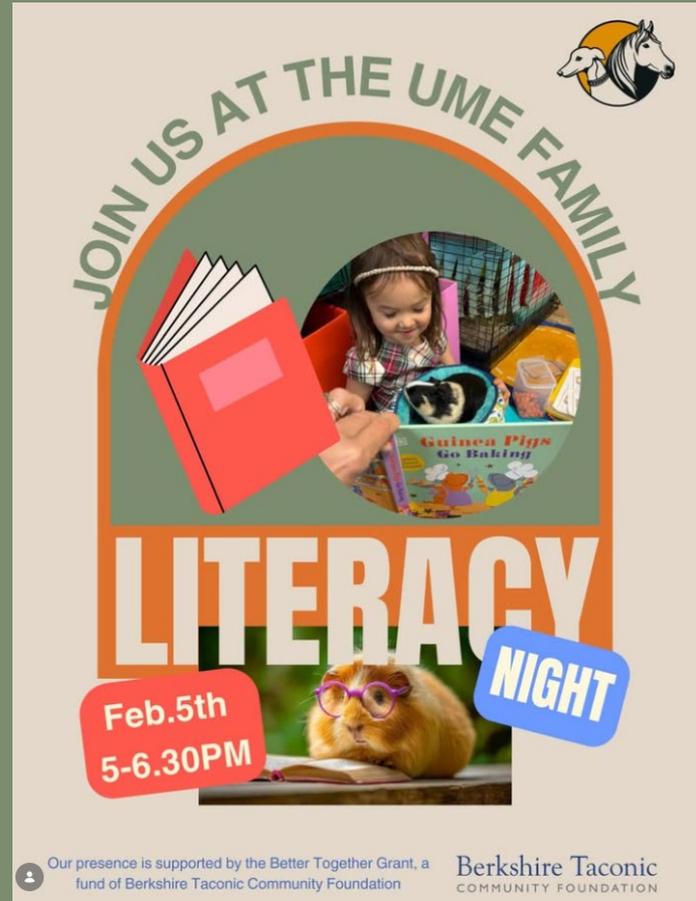
Visit of Kindergarten class to nursing homes with the dogs, weekly sessions

Visit at the Ranch

Monthly visits, in group, in-room, nursing home

4

Insights & Data



JOIN US AT THE UME FAMILY

LITERACY NIGHT

Feb. 5th
5-6.30PM

Our presence is supported by the Better Together Grant, a fund of Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation

Berkshire Taconic
COMMUNITY FOUNDATION



 LE PETIT RANCH
- ANIMAL-ASSISTED ACTIVITIES -

The poster features a central illustration of a young girl reading a book titled 'Guinea Pigs Go Baking' to a guinea pig. A red book icon is overlaid on the left. The event details are in a red box, and the title 'LITERACY NIGHT' is in a blue box. The background is a light green field with a white archway.

Data & Testimonials

Data & Testimonials from our partners

Seniors

Sheffield Senior Center (Sheffield, MA)

Contact: Executive Director

Monthly sessions, ~15-25 seniors per session

“Thoughtful, creative programming that our seniors truly adore, we’re excited to continue in 2026.”

“Our seniors light up when the animals arrive, this program brings smiles, memory recall, and meaningful connection.”

After-school Educational Enrichment (Southern Berkshires, MA)

Contact: Executive Director

Weekly sessions, ~10 children per session

“A hidden gem in our community, the kids love it and look forward to it each week. It goes beyond typical enrichment.”

Kids

Scoville Memorial Library (Salisbury, CT)

Contact: Children’s Services Coordinator

Bi-monthly sessions, ~20-30 children & adults per session

“A joyful and educational experience, our patrons were delighted to interact and learn with the animals.”

Impact Highlights:

- 15 community partner organizations
- 10 sessions delivered per week
- 150+ individuals directly engaged
- 100% gave 5-star feedback across all categories
- 100% eager to collaborate again in 2026
- 100% of the organizations renewed their sessions serie for fall and the winter



Data & Testimonials

Data & Testimonials from parents

Emotional Growth & Confidence

94% of parents observed improvements in their child's emotional well-being, including reduced anxiety and increased self-confidence.

"My 2 daughters (5 and 3) were scared of dogs, even crossing the street to avoid them. Now, they're the first to approach and pet them, it's a total transformation!"

"My son didn't want to go to school, but he changed his mind after participating in Marjorie's activities with her dogs Yayi and Ronja. He gained self-confidence and respect toward everyone (animals and people alike)."



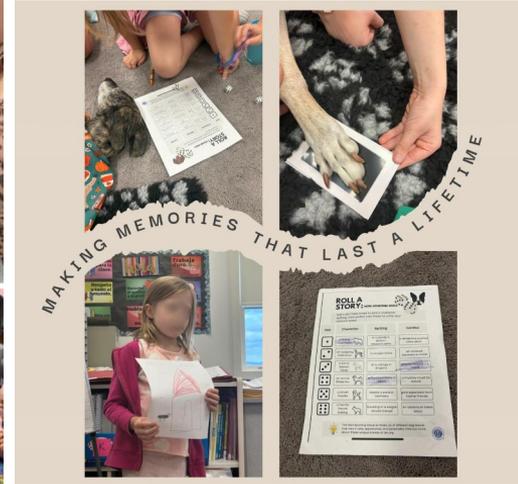
Data & Testimonials

Data & Testimonials from parents

Empathy & Compassion

100% of parents agreed the program taught their children greater empathy, as they learned how to care for animals and understand their behaviors.

“My child spotted a stray cat and interpreted its behavior to determine whether it was hungry or lost. It was an amazing moment of emotional awareness and problem-solving, and I credit Marjorie and the program for fostering that kind of empathy.”



Data & Testimonials

Data & Testimonials from parents

Social and Communication Skills

92% of participants saw improvements in their children's communication and cooperation skills.

Group activities, such as grooming and storytelling sessions with animals, created opportunities for collaboration and social bonding.

"Group activities with the dogs allowed my child to open up and engage with peers in ways I hadn't seen before."



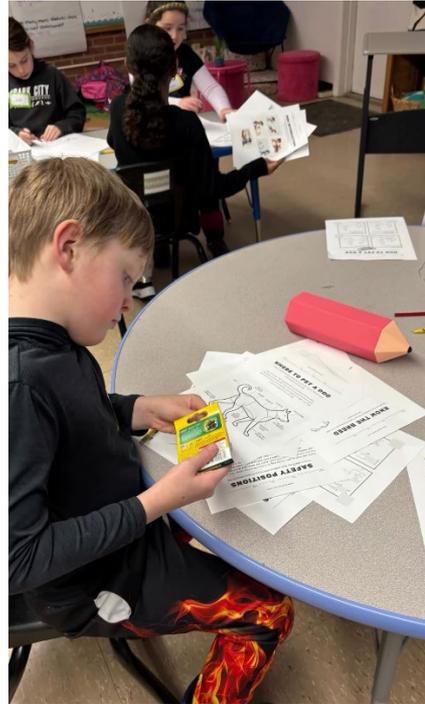
Data & Testimonials

Data & Testimonials from parents

Academic Interest

90% of children showed increased curiosity in learning about animals, with activities like measuring the dogs, understanding dog health, and engaging in creative tasks.

“The program sparked my child’s interest in science, they loved learning how to care for and understand animals.”



Insights

Don't do it alone!

Find partners

- We find it's best we add on to an existing community (Greenagers, Maps, Joe James).
- Embed yourself into the community (Cookie walk, Walkathon, Dog Bite Prevention)

Ask for help

There are volunteers and members of the community who want to contribute and can bring special skills set.

Be flexible

- Adapt the room to the season
- Customization
- Collaboration



Thank you

Marjorie Borreda

Founder, Le Petit Ranch 501c3

PO Box 28

Sheffield, MA 01257

413-200-8081

www.lepetitranch.org

@le.petit.ranch