

A DIFFERENT PERSON AROUND ANIMALS



When Isabel “Izzy” Liljestrand returns home from spending a day with horses, you can feel her sense of excitement. **“She comes home from the barn, the gloominess fades away. She’s more talkative and joyful,”** says her mom, Vera. “It’s like night and day!”

And what brings out this change in personality? “Horses are magical creatures,” Izzy says, smiling. **“I feel great when I’m with animals.”**

With help from the New Mexico Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (NMDVR), Izzy was able to get a job at [Mandy’s Farm](#)—a nonprofit that serves people with developmental disabilities, helping them participate in their community.

The 19-year-old senior at School on Wheels began working at Mandy’s Farm in early 2022. “I clean the barn. I exercise the horses. Sometimes we go on field trips to get more feed for the animals,” she says.

Izzy feels a special kinship to the horses, who don’t care that she has both emotional and learning disabilities, “I have to talk to somebody, and I don’t really get along with people—so it has to be animals,” she says. “Animals tell the truth.”

The Albuquerque native lived in Virginia for three years, where she took riding lessons and enjoyed caring for the horses. But upon returning home, she was having a difficult time finding a place where she could be with animals—until NMDVR made the connection. “It’s been a wonderful experience for her,” Vera says of her daughter’s time at Mandy’s Farm. **“The skills she’s gaining will really help her moving forward for her dreams and her life.”**

Izzy’s life dreams include one day owning an animal sanctuary.

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