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Job Shadow Experiences

11-22-2019

Kentucky Equine Adoption Center (KYEAC)

**Interviews**

Abby and Kaley are horse trainers, retraining off the track thoroughbreds and other surrendered horses from the ground up. They are supervised by Julie Cooper the barn manager and Virginia Madelung the assistant barn manager; and they are not in charge of any other employees. Everyone is supervised by Karen Gustin, the executive director who I was able to coordinate this amazing experience with. Kaley trained at Asbury from the ground up with horses and was a working student in a research setting at a dressage training facility. She also worked as a barn manager at a different barn, but it was not the right setting for her and so she was actively seeking other employment. She was notified about the position opening at KYEAC through Asbury and applied for the training position. Abby has an extensive background in horse training and was working at Tractor Supply when she was sought out by an employee at KYEAC, Julie, to help train their horses. Julie had seen Abby’s previous work training horses which helped her immensely in getting the job. Both trainers enjoy the company of horses and being able to do something different every-day. This career does not have a typical day besides having normal day working hours, there is always something different and they are not always training. The day goes however they want it to, outside of normal feeding times, which they said is very rewarding as the program is all about the horses. The busiest time of year is in the fall into winter as a lot of horses are surrendered from owners that will not be able to take care of them that winter. They said that with most training jobs, employers are looking for experience and watch your work rather than a degree or special certifications. This specific job requires patience with theses feral horses, ability to work with different horses, and the willingness to spend time with the horses. They also said another thing to keep in mind was the training styles and techniques used, for example at KYEAC they want more positive reinforcement used. Non-profits are always seeking help, but not always to hire.

Kelli Summers Sorg is the Development Director in charge of everyone else not barn related and supervised by Karen Gustin. Kelli came from a horseless background as an adult and learned a lot by jumping into buying a farm with her husband. It was there that they realized they did not know anything, and really needed to figure it out. In short, she became interested in equine facilitated psychotherapy, became a pastor, and moved back to Kentucky where she adopted a couple horses from KYEAC. Her passion is in liberty work and that is a large factor to why she enjoys her job at KYEAC. She got her job by reaching out to Karen about the available position. While not working with the center, she owns her own small sewing business which has helped her become successful as the development director. Her experiences as a Clergy have also helped her obtain the skills necessary for this career path. She told me is important to be a strategic planner, have public speaking skills, and know how to interact with the public with her career as director.

**Reflection**

At KYEAC, “horses always come first” and “you never know what is going to happen” (Kelli).I learned so much from this experience, not only about training, but about the non-profit itself. Once I arrived, I was given a quick introduction to the staff, a tour of the facility, and then was able to sit down with a few employees to ask questions. Horse trainers vary from each discipline as to how their training process starts. It is important to have experience with all types of horses in terms of breed, age, where they came from and what they may already know. My biggest take-away and realization is of how much must go in to run a non-profit organization and how dependent they are on volunteers. I found it very interesting that as horse trainers, they do not actually train horses every day nor do they ride all the horses. They generally have about 50 horses to work with at a time and the goal is for them all to be respectful and have ground manners. If they can be ridden, it is expected that they walk, trot, and canter and perform their gait if they are gaited. They are not training for a specific discipline as there are so many horses being taken in and needed to be adopted out. I found it interesting that they are donated so much old tack and used supplies that they then use for their own barn and host tack sales every month. I got to help organize and clean up for their black Friday sale with the trainers.

I was very curious how they got so many horses and what their adoption process was like and it was neat to hear all about it. Kelli explained the process for the horses coming in that they arrive at the center from animal control or surrendered by the owner. Within the 50 or so horses they have, half of them are off the track thoroughbreds. Upon arrival, they are quarantined not only for health purposes but to see if they need to be stalled for longer. Horses are stalled on rare occurrences that the horses are not yet halter trained or are very shy like the ponies I met Minnie and her daughter Mouse. The horses then stay about 8 weeks where they are interacted with, socialized, and of course trained properly. At KYEAC, they use holistic care for the horses which I learned was hands on things like acupuncture. They have interns that come from Midway to do therapy on their horses. The adopting process is actually quite long as they are placing these horses in their forever home.

I want to be a horse trainer outside of working with my personal horses. Being a horse trainer at KYEAC honestly seems like a decent fit for me, but I have never seen myself working for a non-profit and making enough money. Horse trainers starting off do not get paid much and non-profit workers receive even less as the facility is expensive to maintain. I do like the idea of being able to break routine and having the main focus be on the horse’s pace of progression rather than being a horse trainer for clients and the owner’s expectations. In this sense I like how it is basic riding and not particular to a discipline. I think in the future, after I gain more experience and have enough money to support myself, I could work for a non-profit. As they told me, I need experience and an open mind. Moving forward to be a horse trainer, I need to shadow and do research on other horse trainers for their styles and techniques. My goal is to find and shadow and maybe work with a few horse trainers over next semester into the summer where I would have the opportunity to work with younger horses.

Learning everything from the viewpoint of a development director was also interesting to me. I always saw my career being directly involved with horses not being in an office, and I am glad I was exposed to what Kelli does. I had imagined things differently and was not as open minded as I should have been. I find this career insightful as Kelli oversees so many people and organizes so much, including all the volunteers. In the future, I need to stay as open-minded as possible with equine careers as they all pertain to horses. My goal is to explore careers that are not completely hands-on like I am used to.