

# Who can Horse Lovers trust to help horses in equine advocacy?

## By Heart of Phoenix

In the animal rescue world, and beyond, it's hard to know what is genuine.

Social media, AI, mass bail lots, low end horse traders and hoarding situations mean the average horse lover who wants to donate, adopt or volunteer, may struggle if they genuinely want to support authentic equine advocates.

Emotions and sad stories can blur the lines of truth.

A glance over a website will not give anyone enough information to make a good determination. There are multiple areas to consider in order to make an informed decision on where to put your support.

I will mention, policies can vary from respectable organization to organization. A rescue may be excellent and work differently from another in how they operate in terms of policy. Some differences make a wider, yet stronger equine safe net process nationally. Different does not mean wrong, as long as the focus is on equine advocacy.

Some suggestions when make a decision on support:

Consider what your own benchmarks are in equine welfare. What matters to you as a donor or adopter? Are you hoping to invest in a better future for horses with your efforts or are you looking to invest more in the direct impact of the individual animal? This makes a difference. Does what your donation actually perpetuate matter significantly to you? In order to know what good welfare looks like, you do need to understand what equine best practices are from national and international standpoints. Become familiar with the American Academy of Equine Practitioners care and euthanasia guidelines recommend. Research what quality of life looks like in the horse by exploring the Five Freedoms and The Five Domains for Equine Wellness. Do a little work on what reasonable training approaches are for horses. Finding a group that aligns with your informed, personal welfare goals for horses is important.

If you are donating money, make sure you are doing so to a 501©3 organization. This designation is a tax status only. If a rescue is asking for donations, it is best it is legally set up to operate as a charity. The status means they must have a fairly independent board of directors; a single person is not in control. And it means they must financially file annually with the IRS. Remember, this status does not tell you anything about the care of the animals, operations, policies or verify quality of the charity. This doesn't assure you the nonprofit follows federal tax laws. That said, many states require a charity at a certain size to pay for yearly independent audits or reviews. If a charity is meeting these requirements in their state, it means their financials are looked at by experts and have no red flags. Reviews or audits are something you can relay on to feel more secure in your donations and support of an organization.

Take your time to look over the charity's social media and website. Pay attention to details. If a horse is rescued and shared, follow their recovery. If you don't see updates, ask for them in a message. There are reasonable causes some horses may not have updates shared, but you should feel welcome to ask questions. Inquire about the status of a horse, if you have donated towards their care. Look to see horses recovering through posts online. You should see horses maintain a good condition after timely recovery. Familiarize yourself with what healthy horses look like, so you realize when there is cause for

concern. Horses should receive routine vet, farrier and dental care at the facility. Don't be afraid to ask the rescue if you may call the vet's office for a reference if you are donating or adopting. If it seems like a lot of horses come in, but you rarely see updates or clear improvements, this is a red flag. While some rescues do not post on social media, if you saw lots of fundraising and requests about horses coming into the facility, you should see posts about the horses once rehomed and safe in the facility all the way through to adoption. If you start to think, "Where are all these horses going," then pause and look into the situation more.

How does the group fundraise? Do you see posts that indicate frequent desperate pleas for funding? Do you find MOST requests for funding are done in a heavy emotionally driven state making you feel as though if you do not give, a horse will not survive? This is the approach you want to see in a rescue. This does not create sustainability. Does the group receive grants from funders? This is a good sign because most grant makers require significant effort and reporting to receive funding. Do you get the sense the organization is will continue year after year because of a solid, consistent donor base? Does the rescue host events for the community that offer education and serve to raise funds? If so, consider those as green lights.

Look for independent accreditations, collaborations, awards, statements or verifications. These areas are really where you will start to find distinction. Look for a rescue that works well with other established organizations with mutual goals, as that makes a bigger impact on equine welfare. Does the organization submit documents and updates to nonprofit websites that help the public make good decisions when donating, such as Charity Navigator, Great Non-Profits, Candid (formerly Guidestar)? New and small groups may not be aware of these optional reporting platforms, but large and/or older groups will be, so check for what kind of feedback is there. Look for awards, grants or recognition from local, state and federal animal nonprofit centers, such as EQUUS Foundation, ASPCA or Homes for Horses Coalition. Note if they hold independent and strenuous accreditations, such as a Guardian EQUUS Foundation award, Thoroughbred Aftercare Accreditation, Standardbred Transition Alliance Accreditation or Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries Accreditation. These agencies usually do onsite inspections, review financials, verify vet and feeding protocols, assure good policies and require frequent updates. Being willing to maintain this level of transparency and accountability should go a long way in showing the rescue or sanctuary is running well and helping horses within their barn walls and beyond.

Ask, "where do the horses come from in the rescue?" Focus on organizations accepting horses from at risk or in need owners as first line of defense, as well as through law enforcement cases, or horses that are abandoned. While an occasional low end auction purchases can be ethical saves, routine purchases to source the horses coming into the rescue presents concerns. While it can be compelling to support the purchase of horses from broker lot and similar outlets, the downside is that many times, this type of acquisition will only create more incentives for sellers to generate conditions to encourage advocates to purchase horses. This can also lead to a dry up of donation streams allowing for aftercare for horses in rescue situations. It also produces an industry of profit in exploiting horses found in low end sales and neglect situations. That is not something helpful in a horse advocacy nonprofit.

Lastly, and so importantly, explore the adoption process of the equine charity, if they adopt horses out. If they do not, look for a solid strategic plan in place to provide long term care to sanctuary horses. Look over what the process to adopt looks like. See if the process aligns with what you believe it takes to give

the horse a fair chance at a good, next home. Does the group seem invested in their horses? Do they seem to deeply care about making a good match for adopter and horse? Ask the agency what has been done with the horse to make him ready for placement, if you are adopting. The horses should be adoptable once they are safe, comfortable partners or companions. They will be healthy, up to date on vet/dental/farrier care, and they will have received basic training. You should be able to see the organization has made an investment in their quality of life and improved their circumstances. You will see diligence in placing the horses well into suitable homes. You will not get the sense the horse will likely cycle back through hardship. Lastly, the organization will always accept the horse back for the life of the horse, if needed. This is paramount.

I hope this helps you make a good decision when it comes selecting an equine charity to follow and support.