Grant Request: A Saddle for Aspen

Sep 23, 2026

Request Summary

Positive Strides Center requests **$7,000** from the Burke & Herbert Bank Foundation to purchase a custom-fitted saddle for Aspen, a 9-year-old half-draft therapy horse who carries the larger riders our other horses cannot. This grant covers most of an $8,000 project; the remaining $1,000 is being raised through our community campaign, "Aspen Needs a Saddle."

Item	Detail
Applicant	Positive Strides Center, 501(c)(3) (formerly Talbot Special Riders)
Address	6292 Statum Rd, Preston, MD 21655 (Timber Grove Farm)
Amount requested	$7,000
Total project cost	$8,000
Purpose	Custom-fitted saddle and fitting for therapy horse Aspen
Foundation focus areas	Healthcare; Community Development/Recreation
Communities served	Caroline, Dorchester, Talbot, Queen Anne's and surrounding Maryland counties
Funding cycle	Q3 2026 (deadline September 30, 2026; awards November 2026)
Contact	Lynnette Crouse, Office Administrator

Organization Background

For forty-five years, Positive Strides Center has provided equine-assisted services to children and adults with physical, cognitive and emotional challenges on Maryland's Mid-Shore. Our mission is "Promoting healing, hope and growth through equine assisted services."

Founded as Talbot Special Riders, we now operate from Timber Grove Farm in Preston, Caroline County, just down the road from Burke & Herbert's Main Street branch. Our riders come from Caroline, Dorchester, Talbot, Queen Anne's and neighboring counties, the same communities served by Burke & Herbert's branches in Preston, Denton, Federalsburg, Ridgely, Cambridge and Easton.

Our program currently depends on a herd of four therapy horses, each carefully selected and trained, and on a large corps of community volunteers who lead horses and walk beside riders in every session. A

volunteer board of directors governs the organization and is actively involved in fundraising and oversight.

- Individual riders served each year: **54**
- Total lessons delivered each year: **111**
- Active volunteers: **42**

Statement of Need

Aspen is one of only four therapy horses in our program, and he cannot keep working without a saddle built for his size. Our larger riders depend on him, and so does much of our weekly schedule.

Aspen is a 9-year-old half-draft gelding with the size, strength and steady temperament to carry larger riders safely. Four riders are waiting for a horse suited to their size, and he is the only horse in our herd who can carry them. With just four horses, he also carries many of our other riders each week. But his broad back and draft build do not fit the standard saddles we own.

A poorly fitting saddle is not a minor inconvenience:

- **For Aspen**, it causes pressure points, soreness and back injury, which can end a therapy horse's working life early.
- **For riders**, it shifts and slips, making it harder to hold a balanced, symmetrical position. For riders with limited core strength or balance, that is a safety risk and it undermines the therapeutic benefit of the session.

At 9, Aspen has many working years ahead of him, but only if his back stays sound. A custom-fitted saddle is what protects that working life. Without one, we risk losing a quarter of our herd and the only horse who can serve our larger riders.

Project Description

With Foundation support, we will purchase a like-new, custom-fitted saddle for Aspen and have it professionally fitted to his build. A quality saddle, properly cared for, lasts many years, so this single purchase will serve riders for the rest of Aspen's working life.

1. **Professional fitting.** A qualified saddle fitter evaluates Aspen's back, withers and shoulders and recommends a tree width and panel design suited to a draft cross.
2. **Purchase.** We buy a like-new saddle that matches the fitter's specifications, which stretches the budget further than a brand-new custom build.
3. **Final fit and adjustment.** The fitter adjusts flocking and panels on Aspen and confirms the fit under a rider.
4. **Return to service.** Aspen joins the weekly lesson schedule, paired with riders who need a larger horse.
5. **Follow-up checks.** The fit is rechecked as Aspen's muscling changes with regular work.

We expect to complete the purchase and fitting within **[6]** weeks of receiving funds, so Aspen can be carrying riders by **[January] 2027**.

Alignment with Foundation Priorities

This request fits two of the Foundation's giving areas and each of its stated priorities for projects.

Foundation priority	How this project meets it
Healthcare: preventative care	Equine-assisted services build core strength, balance, coordination and emotional regulation, supporting riders' long-term health outside a clinical setting.
Community Development/Recreation: access to recreation that promotes health and wellness	Aspen opens therapeutic riding to larger teens and adults who currently have no suitable horse, expanding access for an underserved group.
Community Development/Recreation: volunteerism and community bonds	Every session relies on local volunteers, so each new rider slot also creates volunteer opportunities for Mid-Shore residents.
Broad benefit within service areas	Riders come from Caroline, Dorchester, Talbot and Queen Anne's counties, all served by Burke & Herbert branches.
Strong fiscal management and board involvement	A volunteer board with an active Treasurer oversees finances; the project has a fixed cost and a community match already underway.

Impact and Evaluation

This grant succeeds if Aspen stays sound and keeps carrying riders, including the four larger riders now waiting for a horse. We will track that with the attendance records we already keep for every rider and lesson, plus simple notes on Aspen's comfort and soundness.

What we will count	Where it comes from	Goal for the first 12 months
Larger riders placed on Aspen	Weekly rider schedule	All 4 riders now waiting
Lessons Aspen carries each week	Attendance records	[number]
Lessons Aspen misses because of back soreness	Barn and vet notes	None
Professional saddle fit checks	Saddle fitter visits	At least 2
Rider and family feedback	One question at the end of each season	At least 3 stories or quotes

Twelve months after the award, we will send the Foundation a one-page report with these results, photos of Aspen at work (with rider consent) and a short story from a rider or family.

Budget

The project costs $8,000; the Foundation's $7,000 covers 87.5% and the community campaign covers the rest.

Expense	Cost (USD)
Like-new saddle sized for a draft cross	$6,000
Professional saddle fitting and adjustments	$500
Girth, pad and fittings sized for Aspen	$1500
Total project cost	**$8,000**

Source	Amount (USD)	Status
Burke & Herbert Bank Foundation	$7,000	Requested
"Aspen Needs a Saddle" community campaign	$1,000	$1265
Total	**$8,000**	

Any amount the community campaign raises beyond $1,000 will go toward Aspen's ongoing tack upkeep and fit rechecks.

Sustainability and Recognition

This is a one-time purchase with no ongoing cost to the Foundation. Aspen's care, feed, farrier and vet costs are already part of our operating budget, and routine tack maintenance is handled by staff and volunteers.

We would be proud to recognize the Foundation's gift:

- A nameplate on Aspen's saddle and stall: "Aspen's saddle made possible by the Burke & Herbert Bank Foundation"
- Announcements on our Facebook page and website when the saddle arrives and when Aspen carries his first rider
- Recognition in our newsletter and annual donor listing
- An open invitation to Burke & Herbert staff, especially from our neighbors at the Preston branch, to visit, meet Aspen and volunteer

Thank you for considering this request. With your help, Aspen can do the work he was brought here for: giving larger riders on the Mid-Shore the same chance to heal, grow and ride that our smaller riders already have.