

THOROUGHBRED PLACEMENT RESOURCES AND ME



Leo Bangura, 11, wrote the following winning entry in the Thoroughbred Charities of America's inaugural TCA Youth Essay Contest.

The contest was open to writers 18 years or younger who have been volunteers, supporters, or benefited from the services of an organization that received a grant from TCA in 2013. Contestants were asked to submit an essay between 300-600 words describing how a TCA grantee charity affected their lives. Bangura wrote about his experience as a volunteer with Thoroughbred Placement Resources (TPR), a Thoroughbred aftercare facility in Upper Marlboro, Md. TPR will receive a grant of \$1,000 for Bangura's winning essay. This essay and the runner-up will be posted on the Racing Hub blog on BloodHorse.com.

My name is Leo Bangura. I live in Bowie, Md., a city right outside D.C. I'm 11 years old. I'm an honor roll student and in the talented and gifted class at Kenmoor Middle School in Prince George's County, Md., and I love it. I also love horses.

Ever since first grade I knew I loved horses. I didn't just love their personality, their talent, or their prettiness; I just loved everything.

When I was in the second grade, I asked my mom for horse riding lessons. She simply said, "If I win the lottery." At that time I was thinking, "What's the lottery?" Then I asked if I could go to a horse-themed summer camp. She said, "Okay." I went to Loftmar Stables in Bowie, Md., for summer camp for two summers. It was great, but I grew out of the camp for beginners. My mom found another camp at Hideaway Horse Center, and there I learned to jump and trot. I also participated in horse camp at Camp Letts another summer. But then I found Leighton Farm.

I found Leighton Farm last spring when I was finishing the fifth grade. That day I was surfing the Internet looking up rescued horses for sale. Even though I knew my mom didn't have \$500 or more to buy me a horse, I still looked, and I found a horse named Gus.

Gus was a retired racehorse. I kept surfing and realized there were oth-



Leo Bangura at the Thoroughbred Placement Resources booth at Pimlico

ers. I found Boyd, and Kim, and Fellow, and the best part was that they were in Upper Marlboro—only 30 minutes away from where I live—at Leighton Farm. I found the farm's website and Facebook page. Using my mom's Facebook account, I left a comment saying, "My son loves horses, and I know you accept interns. Would you mind an 11-year-old volunteering at your farm?"

My mom then gets a message on Facebook from Kim Clark at Thoroughbred Placement Resources saying, "sure," and to contact a woman named Chrissy Church.

My mom says, "Leo, did you use my Facebook?" I thought I was in trouble, but to my surprise I wasn't. I first went to visit the farm; I was nervous. To my

surprise, everyone was laid back and very nice. I started working right away. I worked on getting the feed ready by looking at the bulletin board that said how many scoops of each type of feed each horse needed. It was a lot of work. I started volunteering regularly—once a week—during the summer.

I was really enjoying myself and then something remarkable happened. Kim, the owner, said, "Would you like to ride?" I didn't hesitate to say, "Yes." I rode a horse named Punkie, an ex-racehorse. Kim and Chrissy also let me tag along at a few horse shows. Last weekend I got to volunteer at Pimlico for the Retired Racehorse Training Project. While volunteering at Leighton Farm, I fell in love with a horse—the one and only, Boyd. It is really fun being with horses and helping out around the farm. I have come to love off-track Thoroughbreds and Thoroughbred Placement Resources.

Leighton Farm and TPR have changed my life in general. It has made me a better person today. It has made me learn that life is hard, but if you're dedicated, things will work out. Don't give up and there will be rewards. TCA provides support to organizations like TPR and without TPR, I wouldn't be volunteering and getting to experience and learn more about horses. **BH**

Visit BloodHorse.com/Blogs/RacingHub to view the winning essay and runner-up