

My name is Melanie and I am a volunteer at Simple Changes. I am from Germany and am married to a U.S. soldier who is stationed at Ft. Belvoir. I was looking for something to do after getting here, so I started volunteering at Simple Changes.

I enjoy working with horses and people with disabilities. I love helping at the lessons and have started taking care of the horses. Then I was asked to help out at a session with a group from Brain Injury Services. The people who come don't ride the horses, but learn about why horses act the way they do, how to groom and lead them, what they eat and make them treats.

At the first session I met one guy who had survived a few strokes quite a while ago. It was really hard for him to walk, he wouldn't use his right hand and we couldn't really understand him when he talked. Once we got him started working with the horses, he really seemed to enjoy standing next to Yogi and petting him. He started smiling and was more peaceful.

Then I went home to Germany and didn't come back until the final session, 6 weeks later. When I got to the barn and Corliss, the instructor, said the clients were going to lead the horses. I really couldn't see how the clients from the first session – who didn't walk very well -- would be able to lead horses.

We welcomed the group to the barn and I noticed that the man seemed different. He was way more active. He walked much better, used both hands and his speech was way easier to understand.

We told him how to lead Yogi and he did it! And he did great! Yogi is really big and loves to stop and eat grass, but he kept him going. And was so happy about the great job he did and being with Yogi.

I can definitely say I saw a change. Being with the horses motivated this man to work hard to get better. It showed me again the unique way Simple Changes helps people.

