



Elsie's Barnyard 2025

ANNUAL IMPACT REPORT

Life is Better at the Barn.

The mission at Elsie's Barnyard is to restore and strengthen the hearts, minds, and souls of children and families facing adverse medical conditions and special needs through interacting with animals and nature.



Elsie's Barnyard



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FOUNDER'S MESSAGE

Beyond our mission, our vision is to be a beacon of peace, hope, and love. What I bring to this work is not theory or training alone, it comes from lived experience. I know how heavy life can feel when your child's needs fall outside what most systems expect, and how constant planning, advocating, and adjusting can quietly become normal. I also know how rare it is to find a place where you can exhale without having to explain why you need to.

Sometimes what helps most is not doing more but simply changing the environment. Being outdoors, in nature, and around animals who do not judge or expect anything gives families a break from the daily constraints they are used to facing.

At the Barnyard, children can move freely, and caregivers can focus on connection rather than control. Progress can be celebrated, and hard seasons can be spoken aloud, without sugarcoating or pretending everything is fine.



In 2025, families reflected something back to me that mattered deeply.

This place works because it is consistent and intentional. It does not shift based on who shows up or what they carry. It meets people where they are, every time. Sometimes that kind of space is enough. Often, it is exactly what is needed.



WHO WE SERVE

If most places feel too loud, too fast, or too demanding, this place was created with families like yours in mind.

Elsie's Barnyard is not entertainment. It is not therapy. It is not a petting zoo. It is a peaceful, intentional place for families navigating more than most spaces are built to hold. Families arrive as they are, and that is enough.

Many of the families who benefit most are those whose children see specialists beyond a pediatrician.

We serve children and young adults with a wide range of physical, developmental, and cognitive needs. Some families come during intense medical seasons. Others are navigating lifelong diagnoses. What matters most is not a label, but the daily reality families are carrying.

Families and groups never pay to be here, not for visits, programs, materials, or participation of any kind. The people we serve determine how our programs are designed and delivered.

What happens at Elsie's Barnyard is meaningful. Each offering creates space for connection, dignity, and peace, allowing families and young people to simply be. Our animals play a vital part in all of our offerings, helping to break down barriers and build up rapport.

"The Barnyard offered us a judgment-free, safe space where my kids could be fully themselves." -KB

PROGRAMS WITH PURPOSE



Private Barnyard Visits

Unhurried time for families in a relaxed, welcoming space. Visitors choose which animals and activities they'd enjoy and move at their own pace in a setting designed for comfort and connection.

Field Trips

Accessible, outdoor visits for special education classrooms and day programs. Students interact with the animals as much as they're comfortable, while learning about animal behavior and care through gentle, hands-on experiences.

Caregiver Support Groups

A protected space for caregivers to speak freely, be seen, and connect with others who understand. Children are nearby, safely and thoughtfully cared for by trained volunteers.

Meaningful Work

Hands-on, real responsibility for teens and young adults in a calm setting where honest work builds self-confidence, skill, and a sense of belonging. This program shows how responsibility and trust change what young people believe about themselves.

Family Day Events

Fully supported gatherings where families with shared experiences can spend time together without pressure, judgment, or the need to explain. Each event has a seasonal theme, with crafts and stories for a variety of abilities. Families are free to move through the activities at their own pace.



WHAT THIS WORK LOOKS LIKE

During the Meaningful Work program, I work one-on-one with teens and young adults for a full week at a time. On Monday, a student arrives, quiet and unsure of themselves. They often hesitate before speaking, or their nerves don't allow them to stop talking.

Over the course of the week, we work side by side. The work we do is unfamiliar, physically taxing, downright dirty, and often uncomfortable. We blanch wool, unload pallets of animal bedding, pick berries, trim goat hooves, and so much more.

I watch them roll up their sleeves, take a deep breath, and get their hands dirty. They give it everything they've got, and soon, their confidence catches up.

By Friday, the same student is hardly recognizable. They show up ready for anything, speaking and moving with confidence, grounded in a sense of purpose and belonging.

What changes is not just skill. It is self-confidence.

This kind of growth does not happen in rushed or performative environments. It happens when young people are given real responsibility, steady support, and the freedom to try without fear of failure. This framework exists alongside other systems, not in place of them.

"My daughter spent the summer at the Barnyard as an intern, and she absolutely loved it. She came home every day with big smiles and stories about all she was learning and doing." - AT



COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Partnerships matter because they allow families to experience continuity, trust, and access across systems that were never designed to move together.

Our Role in the Larger System

Families navigating medical needs and disabilities rely on many systems, including medical care, therapies, education, and case management. These services are essential and, in many cases, save and change lives. But they also come with expectations. There are goals to meet, forms to fill out, and progress to track. Caregivers face constant decision-making, always advocating, and vigilant in every situation. Being with others who recognize that weight reduces the feeling of isolation and creates a sense of belonging.

Elsie's Barnyard offers something different. A break from all of that. No pokes. No tests. No pressure to perform. Just a place to be, where families can come exactly as they are. Because no family navigates these systems alone, partnership is essential

Our Community Partners

Local school districts special education classrooms
Disability service providers
Adult day programs
County services
Early childhood programs
Public libraries
Faith communities and churches
Community-based family support organizations

"Our PES group returned to the Barnyard for our annual deep clean and a second year of PES interns. These experiences are incredibly valuable for students building service-learning skills and pre-employment work history."

- JH (Ellsworth HS)



2025 IMPACT AT GLANCE

These numbers reflect time, presence, and connection. They show what becomes possible when families and young people are provided with a space designed for them free from pressure and performance and available at no cost.

572

572 Visits

Each visit represents a child, caregiver, or young adult provided with an opportunity to enjoy nature and animals in a safe and accepting environment.

110

110 Program Hours

This time reflects relationships being built, not just between animals and kids, but also between caregivers, community members, and volunteers. These were not drop-in moments, but heart-to-heart connections.

26

26 Unique Groups

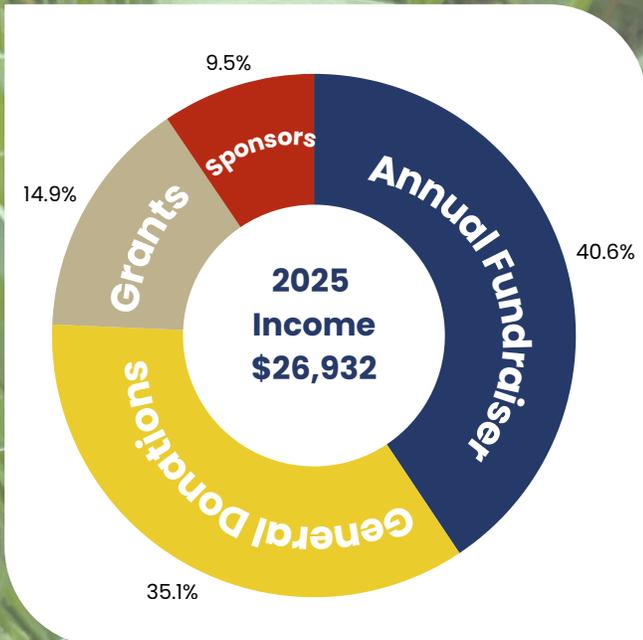
Schools, classrooms, and community organizations partnered with Elsie's Barnyard to provide experiences their participants could fully access and enjoy.

1150

1150 + Volunteer Hours

All of this was made possible by our amazing volunteers. Elsie's Barnyard is 100% volunteer-based, with zero paid staff. Volunteers provide the calm, consistent presence that allows every visit, program, and gathering to remain safe and engaging.

FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP



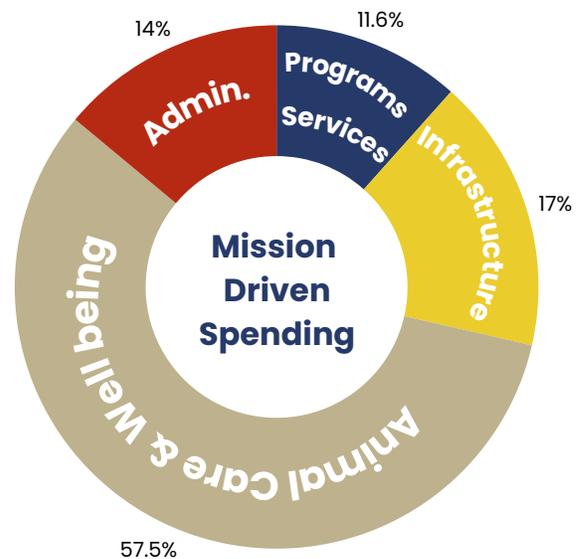
Our income reflects broad community investment, through individual donors, local businesses, grants, and our annual fundraising event.

This diversity strengthens financial stability and ensures Elsie's Barnyard is not reliant on any single source of support. It also reflects shared ownership of the mission across our community.

We are committed to careful stewardship of every dollar entrusted to us. All financial decisions are guided by one priority: sustaining a consistent, accessible place where families can connect meaningfully with animals and nature, always at no cost.

In 2025, the largest share of expenses \$15,325, supported animal care, which is central to every experience we offer. These costs ensure the health, safety, and long-term sustainability of the animals who make this work possible.

Program and service expenses totaled \$3,093 and directly supported hands-on, no-cost experiences for participating families. Infrastructure investments of \$4,529 covered essential systems, facilities, and tools needed to safely welcome families and volunteers. Administrative costs remained modest at \$3,721, reflecting a strong commitment to efficiency and ensuring donor dollars continue to support mission-critical work above overhead.



Future plans are shaped by the same priorities that guide our current decisions.

LOOKING AHEAD

As we prepare for the 2026 season at Elsie's Barnyard, we are excited to introduce Freedom Forest, a small, wooded lot adjacent to the Barnyard that will become a thoughtfully designed natural recreation space where children can explore, imagine, and move at their own pace, all while organically developing both gross and fine motor skills.

Created by a professional arborist and built using materials sourced directly from the woods themselves, Freedom Forest will offer open-ended play shaped by nature rather than traditional equipment.

This addition fills an important gap in our mission. Until now, our work has centered on connection with animals. Freedom Forest brings in the nature-based element we have been missing.

Freedom Forest represents a significant step forward in how we support children's bodies, minds, and emotional regulation—and we invite our community to help bring it to life. Those who choose to support this expansion will play a direct role in creating a space where children can move freely, feel safe, and experience restoration through nature. None of this growth is possible without the backing of those who believe in this work, and we are deeply grateful to those who help make it possible.





THANK YOU

Elsie's Barnyard is sustained entirely by community. The generosity of our partners, individual donors, local businesses, and churches allows us to offer every program at no cost.

Our volunteers make this work real. They care for animals, support one-on-one visits, family day events, field trips, and step in wherever help is needed, including during our annual fundraiser.

We are deeply grateful to the professionals, referral partners, veterinarians, and behind-the-scenes helpers who lend expertise and advocacy.

And to the families themselves: thank you for showing up honestly, for trusting this space, and for creating the steady, compassionate community that defines Elsie's Barnyard.

THANK YOU TO OUR 2025 BUSINESS SPONSORS

Anytime Fitness, Brickner's Phillips 66 Service Station, C3 Church, CCF Bank, Country Partners 4H Club, Edward Jones - Financial Advisor: Hillary Stubbe, Ellsworth FFA Alumni, English Lutheran Church, Kaufhold's Kurds, Inc., Kollbaum Chiropractic, Leonard's Excavating, Onelove Healing Arts, Plummer Concrete, Sargent's Nursery, Skycoat Industrial Armor, Spave, Standards Food Safety Consulting, The Thirsty Badger, Ugly Dog Therapy, WESTconsin Credit Union.



BECAUSE OF YOU



“Having a space where our kids can be who they are with zero judgment is a blessing. Being around other families like ours is amazing. The volunteers always go out of their way and are so helpful and nice. Any time my kids needed help someone was always there, and every activity is intentionally paced so kids are never rushed. Our kids absolutely love being there.” - HF

“Not wanting to leave is a clear sign of how much she enjoys it. We notice new words after T21 group, and she even sleeps better after visits.” - CGO

“Events like the fall get-together brought our whole family together. Everyone was so happy and entertained.” - KW



“Elsie's Barnyard is a breath of fresh air in an over-scheduled world. When you're raising a child with complex medical needs, having a place where your child is welcomed without judgment is priceless. Even after just one visit my child talks about it every day! The care, the safety, and the genuine love we experienced made it a place our family will always hold close.” - PF

“The Barnyard allowed us to not be invisible in this fight we call life.” - LK

“Bert giggled uncontrollably when the pig got its belly rubbed at the fall festival. Mandy is always making sure that Bert's accessibility isn't an issue that prevents his enjoyment or participation” - AL

“The families I work with feel supported there. They know they are not alone.” - AA



Life is Better At The Barn



JOIN US



Contact Us

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Our Website

www.elsiesbarnyard.com

Whether you come alongside Elsie's Barnyard as a financial supporter, a volunteer, or a participating family, your place here is rooted in shared values.

If you have a heart for children with special needs and the families who love them, or if your own family is navigating medical or developmental challenges, we would be honored to welcome you into this community.

This is a place of dignity, intention, and belonging. If the mission speaks to you, there is room for you here.

