

## **United Horse Coalition's Annual Meeting and Panel Discussion**

No zoom meeting this year! The United Horse Coalition's annual meeting and panel discussion was held in person, on Sunday, June 5<sup>th</sup> in Washington, DC. The panel discussion centered on, "*How Accreditation and Partnerships are Professionalizing the Field: What it can do for equine welfare sheltering organizations, the equine community, and the horses they help*". Panel participants included the Standardbred Transition Alliance, Thoroughbred Charities of America, The ASPCA's Right Horse, the Thoroughbred Aftercare Alliance, the EQUUS Foundation, and Daryl Tropea, representing the Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries. A recording of the panel discussion will be available soon.

Each panelist addressed questions that ranked highly among the surveyed interests of the equine rescue/sanctuary population. The first question discussed was, "*Why do you feel it's important for rescues and sanctuaries to become accredited? What's the incentive?*" While many of the responses from the panel organizations were similar, there were certainly differences as well, given that each organization has different missions and goals. From a GFAS perspective, the following are a few of the **impacts** of verification and accreditation that were shared with the audience.

### Recognition

Verification and Accreditation provides equine facilities a simple and meaningful way to communicate that they are officially recognized as committed, capable and worthy of support. This applies to donors, foundations, other rescues/sanctuaries, law enforcement, and the general public. Potential adopters of an organization's equines can be assured of their credibility and professionalism. All panel member's agreed that recognition by an outside credible source is invaluable for equine rescues and sanctuaries.

### Self-Assessment

The accreditation application process is an opportunity for introspection. Going through the accreditation process not only gives an organization the comfort and confidence that they are providing the best in animal care, but it also provides clear, objective, and measurable outcomes by which a nonprofit can assess its performance and make improvements. GFAS refers to this as a compliance or action plan. The accreditation process provides an opportunity for rescues and sanctuaries to get some coaching and mentoring in areas that perhaps they are just now ready to tackle.

### Sustainability

Going through the process, promotes sustainability and decreases the likelihood that an organization will collapse. GFAS helps organizations build tools and protections through creating succession/contingency plans, personnel and operating manuals, and keeping charities financially fit by requiring long-term strategic/financial plans, budgets and strategies to save and maintain financial reserves.

## Mitigating Risks

Going through the process helps an organization understand and identify their specific risks. Nonprofit organizations are exposed to many risks. GFAS can help organizations secure appropriate insurance coverages to protect them from lawsuits. GFAS provides a thorough fire safety analysis of each facility. With help from GFAS directors, organizations develop and assess their emergency/disaster preparedness plans ensuring they are appropriate for each situation. Site visitors will note areas that might be unsafe for either animals and/or humans such as fencing or hazardous materials. Also, having an appropriate lease and lease contingency plan in place, if the property is not owned by the nonprofit, helps to ensure that all animals can be safely relocated to a suitable location if necessary.

## Increasing Capacity

By assisting equine organizations in establishing best practices from the beginning, helping them to succeed, the more capacity exists in communities to help more animals. Many small new equine rescue organizations begin with a lot of compassion and commitment. These groups often feel they are left to recreate the wheel and learn the ropes through trial and error. Many of these organizations fail and often leave the very horses they are trying to help in jeopardy.

## Raising the Bar

Certified organizations invested in best practices teach others by example. Everyone who visits an equine rescue or sanctuary, be they donors, adopters, or volunteers, learn the basics of equine care and management by the example. Also, GFAS certified organizations have an opportunity to be a leader in the field and a mentor to other organizations.

In addition to these impacts, GFAS offers applicants and certified groups with several **benefits and resources.**

- Mentoring and assistance from GFAS staff whenever asked.
- Access to a library of templates and sample documents to assist with policy and protocol development.
- Inclusion in a searchable GFAS Database to enable donors, supporters, and the community to provide support.
- Access to funding opportunities from Grantmakers who require or prefer sanctuaries/rescues who are GFAS certified.
- Access to GFAS Peer-to-Peer online forums and Roundtable webinars to exchange expertise and experience with a variety of sanctuaries caring for various species.
- Inclusion and promotion in monthly GFAS e-newsletters and sanctuary features on GFAS social media

- Direct access to pro bono legal services for sanctuary-related needs through an exclusive GFAS collaboration with Animal Defense Partnership
- Cost savings on insurance coverages through credits offered to certified sanctuaries from three companies for general liability, Directors and Officers, and health insurance for sanctuary/rescue personnel.
- Eligible for year-end awards for outstanding charities in several categories.
- Opportunities to develop alliances particularly for the placement of animals in many states.
- Consideration for small compliance grants to help organizations complete the accreditation requirements.

We sincerely thank the United Horse Coalition (UHC) for inviting GFAS to participate in this very informative panel. The UHC is a broad alliance of equine organizations that have joined together under the American Horse Council to educate the horse industry about the issues surrounding horses-at-risk or in transition. The UHC provides information for existing and prospective owners, breeders, sellers, and horse organizations regarding the long-term responsibilities of owning and caring for horses, as well as focusing on the opportunities available for these horses. For more information, please visit [United Horse Coalition – Helping Americas Equines At-Risk, or in Transition.](#)