

## **D4K Award Recap**

At the start of WIT, I was unfit and lacked confidence in my riding. Over the course of those three months, I improved significantly—and I've continued improving every day since returning home.

In my first month at WIT, I met incredible people and an amazing horse. All of the young women in the program helped me form deep connections and lasting friendships. I also learned important strategies for navigating challenging social dynamics and getting along with people I don't naturally click with.

One of the highlights of WIT was the incredible opportunity to ride a Grand Prix schoolmaster. It was a chance to refine my riding and experience movements I'd never done before. When Empire arrived at Top Meadow, he was also a bit unfit, so we worked together to build strength and develop a deep partnership. We focused a lot on stretching him forward and down to work over his topline. Riding Empire was such a gift—I learned so much from him, especially about my equitation. He helped me improve my posture, look up, and stay balanced in the saddle.

Together, Empire and I tackled many new things, like tempis. Our biggest challenge was shoulder-in, which took a long time to get even 10% correct—but the journey taught me the importance of patience and persistence.

By the second month of WIT, my riding and overall fitness had improved dramatically. I also had the privilege of leading daily fitness sessions for the group, which was both rewarding and challenging. It helped me grow as a leader, especially when working with people who weren't always enthusiastic about participating. Leading fitness kept me accountable and motivated to stay strong for Empire. Since returning home, I've continued my fitness journey, working out about three times a week, with a focus on core strength and weightlifting. It's helped improve my stability and mobility in the saddle.

Since returning home from WIT, I've started working with an incredible new trainer, Heather Salden, who has provided me with both guidance and the opportunity to pursue my competitive goals. Thanks to her support—and the foundation I built at WIT—I've qualified for Regionals at Third Level, and I'm currently working toward my qualifying scores at Fourth Level as well as for my freestyle.

I also had the fantastic opportunity to ride with JJ Tate in a clinic held at my barn. It was a truly inspiring experience, and I'm excited to continue applying everything I learned with Heather's help.

I'm especially grateful to Lendon Gray for everything she brings to the Dressage4Kids Winter Intensive Training program. Her coaching, mentorship, and the incredible network of guest speakers and professionals she brings together made a lasting impact on me. Lendon not only challenged me to grow as a rider but also inspired me to think bigger and push myself outside the arena. The connections I made through her program are ones I will carry with me for a long time.

I am so incredibly grateful for the opportunities this scholarship has made possible. Without it, I wouldn't have been able to attend WIT or grow in the ways I have as a rider, athlete, and person.

Thank you so much to everyone on the selection committee. Your investment in me means the world, and I deeply appreciate your belief in my potential.

Abbie Bove & Empire

