

## **HIPPOTHERAPY: THE HORSE AS A HEALER**

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Now sport is becoming more important for preservation of health and disease prevention, brings joy and relaxation, relieves stress and reduces the natural aggression. Riding for people suffering from neuro-psychiatric illness and disabilities stimulates children development, and adults can compensate for physical and mental disabilities. It has a special role to integrate mentally retarded, as frequently because of a certain lifestyle, which is focused on the disease, man has a little contact with healthy people. Horse riding, along with the possibility of social contact, an opportunity to relax and take pleasure is very important for people with special physical and mental development.

Monitoring during activities of children and adults with neuro-psychiatric illness and disabilities, as well as their families showed:

- interpersonal communication is not enough, besides of therapeutic (like clubs on interests) for this category of people;
- family members with children and adults suffering from nervous and mental diseases and disabilities don't know or could not organize their activity;
- they feel the need to meet and share experiences how to organize best the lifes of their loved ones, make it interesting and diverse.

Working with such category of people and their families, experts were convinced that right organized (besides of therapeutic help) improvement of life conditions for children and adults with special physical and mental disorders is great importance. And it also has a positive effect on the emotional climate in the family.

The survey conducted by Krasnoyarsk Center of Hippo therapy together with doctors and students of Krasnoyarsk Medical Academy, showed that only 18% of families with children and adults suffering from nervous and mental diseases and disabilities were able to organize community-acquired recreational activities for socialization and rehabilitation. 44% of respondents don't know about, existing centers about engagement in organizing activities besides of therapeutic with this category of people. There are not enough money and people for organization of their leisure activities, clubs. Thus, this category of people is almost completely excluded from public life.

One of the ways of organization of such therapy is hippo therapy

Hippo therapy represents a new approach to healing.

Hippo therapy is neurophysiologically oriented therapy using horses (from. greek hippos – horse).

From hippo therapy, to therapeutic riding, to recreational trail riding, the horse can work miracles for the physically, emotionally and neurologically impaired.

Using horses as healers is not a new phenomenon even though it has really only been practiced in the United States since the 1970s. Hippotherapy, known as horse therapy, dates back to 460 B.C. and has been used to treat Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Down Syndrome, Multiple Sclerosis, Angelman's Syndrome, traumatic brain injury and a plethora of disabilities. It is also beneficial for developmental delay, spinal curvature, and learning and language disability.

How does hippo therapy help those with special needs?

Other than the strong emotional connection with a large, beautiful non-judging animal friend, there are many physical benefits too:

- relaxing tight muscles and increasing balance
- building muscle strength
- sharpening hand/eye coordination
- gaining a sense of body-awareness
- gaining a sense of self-control and self-confidence
- improving communication and socialization
- improving concentration and patience
- improving fine motor coordination
- improving sensory integration

#### *Hippo therapy*

It is believed that the rhythmic, repetitive movement of the horse stimulates the central nervous system enhancing neuromotor function and sensory processing. This happens because the human hip movements on a horse are similar to human pelvic movements while walking. Thus it is the horse's movement that becomes a therapeutic tool to improve neuromuscular function.

**Physical therapists:** the physical therapist can overlay a variety of motor tasks on the horse's movement to address the motor needs of each patient and to promote functional outcomes in skill areas related to gross motor ability such as sitting, standing, and walking.

**Occupational therapists:** the occupational therapist is able to combine the effects of the equine movement with other standard intervention strategies for working on fine motor control, sensory integration, feeding skills, attention skills, and functional daily living skills in a progressively challenging manner.

**Speech-language pathologists:** the speech-language pathologist is able to use equine movement to facilitate the physiologic systems that support speech and language. When combined with other standard speech-language intervention strategies, the speech-language pathologist is able to generate effective remediation of communication disorders and promote functional communication outcomes.

Hippo therapy offer psychological, social, and educational benefits. Psychologically, participants can develop self-confidence, a sense of well being, patience, emotional control and self-discipline. The social benefits range from developing friendships, to respect and love for animals, to increased experiences and enjoyment.

#### *Educational benefits from horse therapy*

Remedial math and reading are two areas, along with speech therapy, that can easily benefit from Therapeutic Riding. Because of the setting and the use of horses, there is a significant decrease in the resistance to learning. Games with the horses are used to help children read signs, letters, and numbers. Counting can be incorporated: how many steps did the horse take to complete a trip around the arena? Walk the horse to the number two posted on the wall. When you get to the sign that says stop, turn right. In addition, various activities help develop hand-eye coordination and spatial perception.

Hippo therapy can only be practiced by a licensed physical, occupational or speech therapist. Specially trained therapy professionals evaluate each potential patient on an individual basis to determine the appropriateness of including hippo therapy as a treatment strategy.

The therapy professional works closely with the horse professional to manipulate various aspects of the horse's movement, position, management style, equipment and types of activities to generate effective remediation protocols and to promote functional outcomes. Horses are carefully selected for temperament and gait. Certain ailments may require a

different rhythmic pattern. Besides the therapist, assistants are always used to ensure the patient's safety.

*Therapeutic riding*

Unlike hippo therapy, therapeutic riding does not require that the person conducting the session be a licensed therapist. Most Therapeutic Riding instructors are certified in NAHRA (North American Handicapped Riders Assn.). Therapeutic Riding (TR) varies with each instructor and rider, as TR treats not just physically challenged individuals, but individuals with behavioral, social and emotional disorders also.

Hippo therapy, as the method of rehabilitation of invalid and disable people is becoming more and more important and required. Its efficiency is recognized by parents as well as doctors.