

Therapeutic Horseback Riding – What is all the fuss about?

For many individuals with cognitive, emotional, or physical challenges, therapeutic horseback riding offers benefits not attainable through other, traditional therapy. Not only do they learn horsemanship and riding skills, but they can learn companionship, confidence, educational, leadership, responsibility, self-esteem, and vocational skills through their work with the horse and their therapists and/or instructors. Therapeutic riding programs are usually taught by certified riding instructors. Those instructors can sometimes also be licensed therapists. These individuals assist the rider with their therapeutic, recreational, and/or competitive goals and needs.

The physical benefits are more numerous than most realize. The horse moves at the same gait as the human body (about 120 beats per minute). While the horse is in motion, the human body that is riding the horse moves as if it is walking. Therefore, the human brain processes the movement given by the horse as if the body was walking by itself. All additional movement, exercise, sensory, and auditory instructional input given to the rider while in motion forces motor skill planning, coordination, muscle toning, and more to take place. There is no piece of man-made equipment that can give the benefits – both physically and cognitively – that the horse can give. Therapeutic horseback riding truly can be life changing for the rider.

The types of challenges that can be assisted with therapeutic horseback riding are numerous. They include: Amputee, Autism, ADD/ADHD, At Risk, Brain Injury, Cerebral Palsy, Down's Syndrome, Multiple Sclerosis, Muscular Dystrophy, Scoliosis, Spina Bifida, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, and many more. It can also offer the opportunity to be connected with other competitive sporting organizations that utilize horses.

Therapeutic riding offers multiple opportunities for members of the community to give back as well. Most therapeutic centers are not-for-profits, and depend heavily upon the assistance of hundreds of local volunteers and donors. It is a great place, especially for students, to earn community service hours. Getting involved with a therapeutic riding center will not only allow you to assist someone in need and change your community – whether you volunteer or donate – you may just change your own life in the process as well.

Learn more about the incredible world of therapeutic horseback riding by visiting the American Equestrian Alliance at www.americanequestrian.com.