

## Therapeutic riding and hippotherapy

Since 1992 Sleepy Hollow therapy has been providing hippotherapy, therapeutic riding, riding for the disabled and para equestrian sport riding, for people with special needs.

Our mission is to provide excellence in treating and working with people with special needs, in both Therapeutic riding and an Occupational Therapy. To provide training and education in the field of Therapeutic Riding and Hippotherapy.

Our goal is to assist and inspire our riders and clients to reach their dreams and capabilities.

Sleepy Hollow Therapy is affiliated to both SARDA (South African Riding for the Disabled Association) and EATASA (Equine Assisted Therapy Association of South Africa).

Our unique team have qualifications in B Sc Occupational therapy, SARDA (South African Riding for the Disabled Association) Senior and Branch Instructors, and SANEF Instructor. Contact Lisa for more information

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WHAT IS THERAPEUTIC HORSEBACK RIDING?

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Saddling up a horse is an enjoyable experience for many people, but for an individual with a disability it can signify much more &ndash; a road to recovery. Each year people with physical, cognitive and /or emotional disabilities are discovering the benefits of therapeutic horseback riding. Horse riding provides challenges as well as rewards.

The benefits of horseback riding are as numerous as the types of disabilities and conditions served. Research shows that students who participate in therapeutic riding can experience physical, emotional and mental rewards.

The sense of independence found on horseback benefits all who ride. The therapeutic qualities of horseback riding are recognized by many medical professionals. Individuals of all ages, disabilities and conditions utilize therapeutic horseback riding and other equine activities.

Therapeutic Riding has 3 primary fields: education, sport and medicine, all three may be integrated, or each can be practiced as a specialty. Sleepy Hollow offers programs in all three.

Education and Sport is the teaching of riding skills and is geared towards people with various special needs, and are designed to be more recreational and sport-orientated. The instructors are knowledgeable, experienced teachers with additional training covering disabilities and techniques to meet the needs of our students. Educational specialists, such as teachers and school social workers, may assist the instructors in determining which skills a rider needs to develop.

Therapeutic riding activities that are conducted by medical professionals such as physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech therapists and psychologists are referred to as equine-assisted therapy and hippotherapy.

Equine-assisted therapy is conducted by the therapist in conjunction with riding instructors and volunteers. This type of therapy focuses on the student's performance of exercises on horseback while accommodating the motion of the horse. The therapist plans the activities to achieve specific physical, psychological, cognitive and behavioral goals (e.g. speech development, self esteem, coordination, balance, motor planning, relaxation). Riding instruction may or may not be a secondary goal.

Hippotherapy literally means &lsquo;treatment with the help of a horse.&rdquo; In its classical form, this type of therapeutic riding involves the client sitting on the horse and accommodating automatically to the three-dimensional swinging motions of the horses back while a trained therapist controls the horse. The rider does not attempt to influence the horse in any way.

## WHY THE HORSE?

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Our therapeutic horses serve as unique vehicles for exercising one's body and spirit. Horseback riding provides physical, mental and emotional rewards. The horse's gentle, rhythmic movement helps increase the balance, muscle control and strength of riders with impaired mobility.

Riding motivates children and adults with learning disorders or mental disabilities to increase their levels of concentration, patience and discipline.

Relationships form between horse and rider allowing people with emotional disabilities to overcome fears and develop trust in the therapeutic team and themselves. This unique relationship that is formed with the horse can lead to increased confidence, patience and self-esteem

OUR UNIQUE TEAM

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At Sleepy Hollow Therapeutic Riding Center we specialize in helping children and adults with disabilities meet their individual goals through learning to ride and interacting with horses. Therapeutic horseback riding uniquely promotes the physical and emotional well-being of our riders through interaction with a horse, an instructor or a therapist, and volunteers. The horse stimulates the body; the riding instructor and the therapist create the learning situation. We give our riders opportunities to achieve success in reaching their goals and to develop a special bond with their horse and other friends at Sleepy Hollow.

THE EFFECTS OF THE MOVEMENT OF THE HORSE'S WALK ON NON AMBULANT PEOPLE

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Many of our clients are non-ambulant, and the movement of the horse has an effect on improving their ability to walk. The way the movement of the horse, when it is walking, effects the seated rider is profound. The horse's movement moves the human pelvis in exactly the same way that the pelvis would move when the human is walking. The difference on the horse is that the human does not have to actively move their pelvis, the horse does it for them. There by the human body learns what it feels like to walk with out having to actively do the movement. This allows for increased sensation, weight shift, rotation, range of movement and normalization of muscle tone and learning what the movement of the walk should feel like. In one walk stride of the horse the seated human has to re balance 8 times, so the horse becomes one of the most dynamic therapeutic tools and modalities available. The benefits for non-ambulant people such as quadriplegics, paraplegics, developmental delays, severe low tone, spina bifida, multiple sclerosis, cerebral palsy and strokes are huge.

THERAPEUTIC HORSEBACK RIDING OFFERS A POSITIVE, ALTERNATIVE EXPERIENCE THAT'S MOTIVATIONAL AND FUN

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Since recorded time, we know that the horse has served humanity. In his relationship with mankind his use has included a food source, transportation, work, worship and war. His entrance into the rehabilitation field is deeply rooted in history. Early mythology tells of the horse being used as a healing agent and medical writers comment favorably on riding in the treatment of disease as early as 325 AD.

What does riding do for the people with disabilities that cannot be similarly achieved in the treatment room or in other activities such as swimming? Little empirical research has been completed on the results, however, the use of accurate progress notes, reports from physicians, teachers, therapists, parents, etc., gives testimony to the fact that riding accomplishes the following:

Psychological:

1.

Helps the individual adjust to his/her disability

2.  
Offers a personal challenge leading to a sense of achievement.
3.  
Restores and enhances self-image and confidence.
4.  
Provides emotional stimulus and motivation through the responsiveness of the horse to the rider's wishes.
5.  
Promotes decision making and thinking ahead.
6.  
Teaches a skill &ndash; stable management, grooming ect.
7.  
Teaches anticipatory response and sequencing of actions&ndash; rider kicks horse, thus forward motion.
8.  
Enhances comprehension, concentration and memory skills.
9.  
Useful for behavior modification, especially in the area of self &ndash; control.
10.  
Development of love relationship between rider and mount.
11.  
Rider learns to recognize, accept, and cope with fear.
12.  
Enhances social interaction.
13.  
Encourages and develops independence.
14.  
Develops body localization and awareness, spatial organization, directionality and laterality, visual acuity and form discrimination.
15.  
Reinforcement for effort comes immediately, encouraging further effort as well as promoting a positive attitude and a sense of general well-being and accomplishment.
16.  
Teaches the value of safety rules and discipline.

17.

Promotes relaxation and release of tension

Physical:

1.  
Improves balance &ndash; movements of the horse alter the rider&rsquo;s center of gravity, thus forcing him/her to maintain balance.
2.  
Stimulates righting and equilibrium reflexes, inhibits tonic neck reflexes.
3.  
Improves posture.
4.  
Normalizes muscle tone.
5.  
Increases range of motion, reduces and prevents contractures.
6.  
Builds muscle strength.
7.  
Improves cardio-vascular functioning.
8.  
Stimulates body metabolism
9.  
Develops eye-hand co-ordination, fine and gross motor skills.
10.  
Offers sensory stimulation through activity and surroundings.
11.  
Encourages reading and speech through games and activities.

12.  
Allows contact with animals and the understanding of their welfare

13.  
Offers comfort as riding is a natural reflex inhibiting activity.

The horse can be used to help increase self awareness, helping people to live not only with the rest of the world, but with themselves as they really are. Horses have been referred to as the finest "mood altering drug" for those they motivate – with only positive side-effects. So often learning failure brings countless emotional problems in its wake. The underachiever at school becomes the "odd man out" at home and the object of pity or derision amongst his or her peers. There follow a variety of problems all of which result in poor self image and a total lack of self confidence.

Under the guidance of trained personnel the horses are used in countless ways to redress problems of this nature. The horse provides the steadying influence lacking in so many cases. His demands are logical and straightforward. He does not harass his human friends with questions they would rather not, or cannot answer, but challenges honestly. He respects those that care for him and makes no comparisons. He provides honest, immediate and direct feedback. If he is not treated well he will not perform the services asked of him. All this adds up to a picture of consistency and reliability. These factors are often missing in people with psychological issues and people with substance-use disorders. They are looking for definite boundaries: for someone who can judge them not on their failures but by their achievements: and above all for some one who accepts them as they are and then sets out to help them make the most of their lives regardless. **THESE ARE THE THINGS HORSES DO.**

As a result people voluntarily accept clear and challenging boundaries, demanding commitment and responsibility. If a rider continually causes a horse discomfort he will not do as he is told. Mixed messages mean nothing to a horse: he responds to a series of clear, positive commands. He does not have any opinions about his carers other than those formed by the way in which he is provided for; whether the person who brings him his feed is fat, thin, tall, short, quick witted or slow to understand it makes no difference at all. All that matters is that the feed comes regularly and that there is enough of it. The horse in exchange for his care offers the carer unconditional acceptance, something which too many prove a first time experience. Add to this the experience of actually riding the horse and the person finds himself in the exhilarating position of being able to bring about achievement in the friend he has grown to trust – two way communication has indeed been established!

## DEFINITIONS AND RIDER INFORMATION

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**DEFINITIONS OF RIDING FOR PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS** Hippotherapy: literally means treatment with help of horse. This is done by OT speech or physiotherapist, is a medically prescribed procedure done by health professionals. Rider doesn't learn to ride, goals are therapy directed and all sessions are one on one. These therapists need to have specialised training which will soon be available in this country. Therapeutic Riding: This is done by a SARDA senior instructor in conjunction with a therapist where the focus is on the rider's performance on horseback while accommodating the movement of the horse. Riding instruction may or may not be a secondary goal. In therapeutic riding, activities on horseback are done with recommendation from a therapist. Therapeutic riding is a holistic therapy that works in conjunction with other therapies. Some of Lisa's riders have gone from therapy client to Para equestrian Olympic gold medallist! Riding for the Disabled: This is free, specialised horse-riding for people with special needs. The goal of riding for the disabled is for riders to be taught horse skills and riding while being influenced by the movement of the horse. It is taught by a qualified SARDA instructor. A therapist is not necessary. Sport Riding: This is where riders are identified to have ability and skills to influence the movement of the horse. The goal is to potentially compete in competitions. No therapist is involved. This is done by a qualified horse and rider trainer.

Types of disabilities and conditions served include:

Amputations. Attention Deficit Disorders. Pervasive Developmental Disorders. Brain Injuries. Cerebral Palsy. Down Syndrome. Emotional Disabilities. Hearing Impairments. Learning Disabilities. Mental Disabilities. Multiple Sclerosis. Muscular Dystrophy. Post Polio. Speech Impairments. Spina Bifida. Spinal Cord Injuries. Visual Impairments. Cardiovascular Accident/Stroke. Substance Abuse. Sensory Integration Dysfunction. Low Muscle Tone

Sleepy Hollow Therapeutic Riding Center has been providing its services to people with disabilities since 1992 & regular lessons since 1978. We are accredited by the South African Riding for the Disabled Association (SARDA) and adhere to its standards for safety and operation.

We have qualified SARDA & South African National Equestrian Federation (SANEF) Instructors and Senior Instructors and Examiners and B Sc Occupational Therapists working at Sleepy Hollow. For more information or to arrange a visit to Sleepy Hollow please call us.

**NO PETS ALLOWED**

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