

# Children healed by horses

*Therapy aids mental, physical abilities*

Compiled by Toni Mattson

Imagine a chubby-faced, healthy, vibrant little 2-year-old-boy. He loves cars, trucks, motorcycles ... basically anything that goes fast! He runs, jumps, plays wildly, talks incessantly and leaves a path of toddler destruction wherever he goes.

He's all boy. He's healthy and perfect. He is my son.

While playing one afternoon, he collapsed suddenly, suffering a severe cardiac arrest and immediate respiratory failure. He was quickly leaving this world behind.

Though he had never been sick a day in his life, we learned he was born with a degenerative heart condition that predisposes individuals to heart failure. His little heart needed to be "shocked" three times to bring him back. He needed a machine to breathe life into his tiny lungs. He was placed into a drug-induced



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**Jessica Bergeman and her son, Jeffrey. After suffering severe cardiac arrest when he was 2, Jeffrey now has problems controlling his muscles and digesting solid food. The family is using therapeutic horse riding to help rehabilitate his body and lift his spirits.**

coma to allow swelling in his brain to decrease. He sustained irreversible, global brain damage, as a result of the lack of oxygen during his heart attack. His status and his future were changed permanently in an instant. He fought many weeks just to stay alive.

That fighting spirit has propelled us to today. He fights through painful muscle spasms that attack his body constantly. He battles through uncomfortable therapy sessions to regain the tiniest amounts of strength and function. He tolerates an all-liquid diet void of the yummy things he used to devour. His lively personality stays trapped inside a body that won't cooperate, and his voice struggles to get out the one syllable that he can muster.

He is wise. He is strong. He is a teacher and an inspiration to many. But most importantly, he is still my son and is still just a boy.

Therapeutic riding provides Jeffrey an experience that is much more than therapy. I've personally seen much improvement in muscle tone with Jeffrey.

But it's also an opportunity for him to just be a little boy again, if only for an hour each week, in between the other grueling therapy regimens. For that hour he is relaxed atop his horse. He smiles, and even laughs. That laughter is the light of my life and the reason why we love therapeutic riding.

— Jessica Bergeman

Alyssa began therapeutic riding at 4 years old. She's now almost 10.

She was diagnosed with apraxia, dysarthria, low muscle tone and severe sensory issues when she was a baby. She didn't know where her body



Contributed photo

**Alyssa Pekula has therapeutic riding sessions to improve her balance**

was in space, with very little balance.

Therapeutic riding has given Alyssa a sport she can participate in despite her disabilities. We've watched her go from needing two side walkers to independently trotting.

The horseback riding has helped her balance tremendously. She went from consistently falling, to now independently running. It has helped her speech and dramatically increased all her coordination and the low muscle tone in her trunk. One of Alyssa's first learned phrases was "walk on."

There is no other therapy that can do so much and not be seen as therapy by the child.

Alyssa spends a lot of time talking about her horse, Dancer, and loves every minute she gets to spend with her.

Horseback riding gives a child with a disability a chance to be like their peers, which is something every parent hopes for. To see the smiles, the confidence it gives them, and to see them interact with

the horse, volunteers and their peers is a wonderful gift. Over the years, we have started and stopped speech, occupational and physical therapy often, but the one consistent therapy we've kept is horseback riding.

— Jenny and Gary Pekula

Why does this therapy work?

Our brain is constantly communicating with our body.

It is assessing it's surroundings, making adjustments and compensating. But sometimes an injury or illness can impair those assessment and compensation pathways, creating a disability. Those pathways need to be strengthened and rehabilitated.

Why therapeutic riding?

It's because horses have a very unique walking gait. It closely resembles a human. The movement, motion and rhythm is therapy to those damaged pathways and the body begins to change.

First you see it on the outside: relaxing, strengthening the muscles, improving balance and coordination begins. Then you can see a change as they gain self-confidence and hope.

— Toni Mattson

## About the author

Toni Mattson is the director of programs and ministry at Trinity Equestrian Center, 55300 Highway 37.

# Shed pounds in a trance

By Richard Marano

Have a piece of cake. That's right. Go ahead and enjoy a nice, delicious piece of cake ... and still trim down!

How? With the very safe, very relaxing and very beneficial use of hypnosis. Now, to be clear, if you ate a piece of cake, maybe two, every day, you'd certainly not have much luck losing weight. But every once in a while ... under control ... have at it.

In a pleasant hypnotic state or trance or rest one has the ability to program subconscious and unconscious levels of his or her mind.

You do have that control and the ability to change habits and lifestyle, whether it be eating and drinking habits or anything you wish to change in your life for the better.

Hypnosis, in the case of changing eating patterns, is the reprogramming of old, self-defeating habits. Quick and dramatic changes can and will take place if you simply want them to. That's always the key to any change.

To make this even more palatable, these changes somehow have a way of seeming effortless. Sounds too good to be true, but I know it works and with almost everyone.

I couldn't quite explain the science of how you accomplish this within the confines of this article. But do you really need to know exactly how your loving, powerful subconscious mind will be a willing accomplice to making changes in your life?

While in a pleasant hypnotic rest, one is always awake and under complete control. It feels good during and after. So, why not give it a try? What do you have to lose? Oh, yeah ... those extra pounds!

## About the author



Richard Marano is a certified hypnotherapist from the Hypnosis Center of Eau Claire and has been in full time practice since 2003. You can catch his weekly television program "Hypnosis Today" on Community Television at 8 p.m. Wednesdays and 11 a.m. Fridays.