

# Horses aid in therapy



Contributed photo

An adult with disabilities waved during a therapeutic riding session at Trinity Equestrian Center near Eau Claire.

By Toni Mattson

From an article in the Rutland Business Journal (Rutland, Vt.) to the widely read and collected "Chicken Soup for the Pet Lover's Soul" books, therapeutic riding for individuals with disabilities continues to be heralded for its "profound and life-changing" affects.

Therapeutic riding for kids and adults who are coping with conditions such as cerebral palsy, Downs syndrome, multiple sclerosis, communication disorders, mental illness, autism, depression, arthritis and many others, is not a new discovery. In fact horses have been used for decades in this type of therapy and have been remarkably effective in ways no human could ever hope to be.

You might ask, why a horse? Interestingly enough, it's in the gait.

A horse is the only animal in the world whose gait mirrors that of a human.

The physical benefits of therapeutic riding are derived from this walking gait. No machine or exercise equipment can simulate all the natural body movements at once. That is precisely why there is literally no match for its effectiveness.

But that's only what happens on the outside. What happens on the inside is equally miraculous.

When a horse and rider connect, it is something everyone should see. It begins with

a beaming smile and a noticeable relaxation when a fluidity is reached matching movement between horse and rider. Then you see it in their eyes, a Rocky-like won-it-all attitude and soaring self-esteem. They sense they can do just about anything after realizing the unconditional bond they just made with a gentle giant nearly 20 times their small size; one who doesn't judge or measure their worth by their abilities, but who just wants to be their friend and help. It's truly incredible.

If you have ever seen this in action, you know of the life-changing experience this is for those riders. You have seen firsthand how it translates directly into a refreshing sense of independence and motivation for that person.

If you have not seen this in action, I would encourage you to do so. You will be changed! Better yet, I would like to invite you to become part of a therapeutic riding program as either a volunteer or a financial supporter.

To learn more about this profound and beneficial program and to find a therapeutic center closest to you, call your chamber of commerce or Google search "therapeutic riding."

## About the author

Toni Mattson is an owner and director of programs and ministries at Trinity Equestrian Center in Eau Claire. She is an ordained chaplain and international speaker for God's Great Outdoors. Contact her at [toni@trinity-ec.com](mailto:toni@trinity-ec.com).

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