



Professional Association of Therapeutic
Horsemanship International

"Ensuring excellence and changing lives through equine-assisted activities and therapies"

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**Coming Through a Different Gait:
By Partnering With Equines, PATH Intl. Produces Change**

Denver—Throughout the world, hundreds of thousands of individuals experience the benefits of equine-assisted activities and therapies (EAAT). At PATH Intl., which is a global authority, resource and advocate for EAAT, those activities may include therapeutic horseback riding, hippotherapy, carriage driving, interactive vaulting (similar to gymnastics on a horse), carriage driving, equine-facilitated psychotherapy and equine-facilitated learning. A physical, cognitive or emotional special need does not limit a person from interacting with horses. In fact, such interactions can prove highly rewarding.

Take, for example, Carly Renguette, winner of the 2011 PATH Intl. Youth Equestrian of the Year award. Carly had sustained a cervical spinal cord injury that left her with spastic quadriplegia and placed her first on a ventilator then in a wheelchair. Part of her rehabilitation included therapeutic horsemanship, to which she credits much of her progress. Carly progressed from a wheelchair to a walker and is now using arm crutches, just recently taking a few steps independently. While Carly's progress cannot be considered typical and in no way suggests a cure through EAAT, her experience does highlight the possibilities for people with physical challenges to move toward greater health, independence and quality of life through the addition of EAAT to participants' goals.

Experiencing the rhythmic motion of a horse can be very beneficial. Riding a horse moves the rider's body in a manner similar to a human gait, so riders with physical needs often show improvement in flexibility, balance, muscle strength, coordination, circulation and breathing. The unique relationship formed with the horse provides such benefits as increased confidence, patience and self-esteem as well as improving relationships and social skills.

Individuals of all ages and from all walks of life who are served by PATH Intl. may face any number of challenges, including paralysis, stroke, Alzheimer's disease, multiple sclerosis, autism spectrum disorder, Down syndrome, substance abuse, traumatic brain injury, post-traumatic stress disorder or amputation. In many instances, licensed physical therapists, occupational therapists and psychologists are involved. Individual goals are related to the participant's needs.

Scientific research on the effectiveness of EAAT has been increasing in recent years as anecdotal evidence has captured public interest and media awareness, raising the need for quantitative data. A large amount of research in EAAT has involved children with cerebral palsy. One published study measured head and trunk stability changes in children with CP after 12 weeks of hippotherapy treatments provided by an occupational or physical therapist. The children showed very significant improvements in control of their trunks and heads at the end of the intervention period and maintained improvements after a 12-week period without treatment.

Silkwood-Sherer and Warmbier (2007) studied the effects of hippotherapy on postural stability in persons with multiple sclerosis. They found that the group receiving hippotherapy demonstrated a statistically significant improvement in balance following seven weeks of intervention. The comparison group showed no improvement in balance.

To see these and more research findings, visit the Learn More About EAAT page at www.pathintl.org and scroll down to EAAT Benefits.

PATH Intl. Strides, the association's quarterly magazine, has published stories on research studies affiliated with its centers. The Spring 2011 issue was dedicated to research, featuring the results of a pilot study conducted by Colorado Therapeutic Riding Center, a PATH Intl. Premier Accredited Center (PAC) in Longmont, and Children's Hospital in Denver on using therapeutic riding as an intervention for individuals with autism spectrum disorder. Another article reported on the research partnership between HorsePower Therapeutic Learning Center, a PAC in Colfax, NC, and the University of North Carolina at Greensboro Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders to study the benefits of EAAT on the cognitive impairments associated with traumatic brain injury when paired with traditional treatments.

Simply put, lives are changed through interaction with horses, and research is beginning to substantiate the stories of people like Carly. Carly is not the only one. Visit the PATH Intl. website to read the research articles in *Strides* and to read the inspiring stories of other individuals whose lives have been changed and enriched by the equines with whom they partner.

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About PATH Intl.:

In 1969 the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International (PATH Intl.) was formed by individuals in the United States who were already providing quality services. They identified the need to organize and founded the association to promote safety and optimal outcomes for participants.

As a result, PATH Intl. centers and professionals insist upon safety and focus on possibilities. This commitment to offering the safest possible experience is the reason medical professionals, organizations and families seek out and trust PATH Intl. members with the well-being of their loved ones.

With more than 850 member centers, 54,272 children and adults find a sense of independence through involvement with horses. There are nearly 45,000 volunteers, 4,397 instructors, 6,343 equines and thousands of contributors from all over the world making a difference in people's lives at PATH Intl. Centers.