

The Benefits of Therapeutic Horseriding – Physiotherapists Perspective

Therapeutic Horseriding is a uniquely challenging motor and sensory experience which can impact upon the many and varied facets of disability. During each riding session the rider is stimulated physically, mentally and socially to develop and maintain new skills which can have a very positive affect upon their independence, functional ability and emotional wellbeing.

The Physiotherapy Staff within NHS Tayside who have both instructed and participated in Therapeutic Horseriding sessions have witnessed many improvements within their riders.

- “it is a physically challenging and stimulating motor experience which encourages improved [posture](#), [balance](#), [coordination](#), [muscle strength](#) and [endurance](#) without the restriction of sitting in a wheelchair”
- “the unique motor experience which riding can offer to someone used to sitting passively in a wheelchair all day long is quite literally [liberating](#) and coloured by different speeds , intensities and rhythms which can not be replicated elsewhere”
- “it is a focussed activity seated in an elevated position on horseback in stark contrast to the lowly position always adopted by sitting in a wheelchair. This promotes a [feeling of importance](#), [confidence](#) and [self esteem](#) in a group where depression, low self esteem and lack of self confidence can predominate”
- “riding in the specialist conditions, created by the Riding for the Disabled Association ethos and training, provides a mentally stimulating and encouraging environment ideally suited to foster continued [learning](#) and the [development](#) of new [physical skills](#)”
- “riding repeatedly with the same large group of volunteers, therapeutic staff and riding school staff promotes the formation of [friendships](#) and [social interactions](#) which are extremely potent for people with a broad range of disabilities “
- “it is a [physically challenging](#) and stimulating motor experience which allows a [positive expenditure](#) of [energy](#) in a co-ordinated and controlled manner – a very valuable activity for those whose behaviours offer challenges or those who are on the [autistic spectrum](#)”
- “following a riding session where the rider exerts themselves and channels their excess energy in such a constructive manner, their ability to [concentrate](#) on [cognitive](#) tasks is enhanced”

- “Riding encourages physical contact and [empathy](#) between horse and rider. Some of the children from the Child and Family Psychiatry Service, who participated in a recent riding project, formed close and caring bonds with their horse, they learned to groom and feed their horse and spoke about `their` horse with firm attachment and fondness. This is a crucial first step to forming better [relationships](#) with their peers, parents and siblings. Horseriding is an [exploration of trust](#).”
- “ Horseriding is an exceptional addition to the armoury of `equipment` which a therapist has at his or her disposal. Observing therapeutic Riding sessions can reveal that each session in fact intertwines the therapeutic goals of [several professions](#) at the one time. For instance when a person who has suffered a stroke rides - the clarity, tone and repetition of the riders voice required to instruct the horse may help to reinforce the [Speech & Language Therapist`s](#) work; the stimulation of sitting balance and coordination of leg activity will echo the [Physiotherapist`s](#) work and the stimulation of tactile sense and dexterity in the hands to hold and manipulate reins will be part of the [Occupational Therapist`s](#) goals.”
- “ Apart from the hugely long list of Therapeutic goals which can be generated from a Therapeutic Horseriding Session, this type of activity has a `Trump Card up its Sleeve` as far as each rider is concerned, its simply great [fun](#). In a Health Service, which is often focussed on the speed of someone`s recovery, the effect of the [engagement](#) of a person in his or her own treatment programme cannot be underestimated. If a treatment session offered to someone as part of their rehabilitative programme is fun and enjoyable then they will put more energy and commitment into these sessions and reap far greater rewards.”