

## **The Benefits of Therapeutic Horseriding – Rider Testimonies**

Several groups of people have participated in Therapeutic Horseriding with Specialist Physiotherapy staff from NHS Tayside. These groups come from the following Services - Adult Learning Disabilities; Child and Family Psychiatry ; Adult Psychiatry ; and Child Health.

It is essential to gather and assess the feedback from those who ride. In some Children with Psychiatric Illnesses together with Children and Adults with Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities, there may be communication difficulties and barriers to understanding. Their testimonies may be translated by care staff from non-verbal forms of communication eg. Makaton sign language, body language, drawings or behavioural indicators. Case studies from actual experiences have been included where appropriate.

- “As John’s key worker , I’m sure that he looks forward to Tuesdays when he goes riding. He is pretty withdrawn in the ward, he walks very unsteadily and has very tight hips. When John is on the horse he has a very pleased look on his face, he looks really settled there actually, and the stretch it gives his hips seems to carry on after we get back to the hospital as he walks much better and taller. “
- “ Walking alongside Kevin when he goes riding is strange. I haven’t known him that long in the ward, but he seems to me to be very different when he’s riding. He was even singing on the horse last week- that was amazing as I`ve rarely heard him speak on the ward “
- “ As Colin’s Physiotherapist I know that riding is uniquely suited to bring out the best in him. His cerebral palsy causes him to have tremendous muscle spasms which are out of his control. Using his communication aid, he has told me that his neck and back feel very tight and sore and that he frequently has headaches. Since he began riding, by lying across the horse’s back, the stretch combined with the horse’s movement has really helped to combat these painful spasms. Colin gets really upset if we have to cancel a session, he would like to ride every day if he could! “

- “ I was scared at first but they helped me to get on the horse and helped me to overcome some of my fears ..... the first time I couldn't believe I'd done it but I felt better the next time and I was pleased that I'd managed to take part”
- “ I thought no I'm not doing that, I'll just refuse, but then I agreed to take part because I was curious to see what it was like ..... I actually enjoyed it and wanted to skip German the following Wednesday to go again “
- “ before I got on the horse I was excited and nervous, after I was happy – I really enjoyed it ..... I felt more cheerful after “
- “ I went home for the first time in ages at the weekend. My big brother thinks he's really cool and does lots of stuff more than me, but he's never been on a horse! Mum said she was proud of me being brave enough to ride a big horse “
- “ I can't believe that the same kids who were knocking spots off each other in the mini bus coming down here are actually helping each other, what have you said to them ?! “
- “ Sarah has amazed me today. She was adamant that she wasn't going near a horse and her anxiety levels were sky high but she's actually done it, and is grinning like a Cheshire cat into the bargain ! “
- “ We ask that the children aim to reach their treatment goals in small , sizeable chunks, like small steps leading up a tower. From what I have seen of young James he has leapt half a dozen steps this morning alone. This is a very potent treatment tool – why didn't we think of this years ago ? “
- “ That was really hard work , I was sweating like mad. Can I ride for longer next week please.”