



HORSEPLAY
THERAPY CENTER



Horses have served many great purposes in history, and they are creatures worth admiring. For HorsePlay Therapy Center, horses provide strength, support, trust, courage, and confidence in our clients as well as our team.

In 2013 when I was introduced to physical therapy on horseback, I had no idea of the impact it would have. I could see the physical benefits of it, but at the time I didn't know the full value of using the horse in therapy. I did not grow up with horses and had no experience with them, yet I felt this unwavering call to work with them. At that time, I had been working as a pediatric physical therapist for 12 years with early intervention, and it was good! So why horses? I have no idea, but I knew I had to walk into this adventure. So began my journey of leaving what was comfortable in my career and stepping into what was uncomfortable to contribute to the greater good.

Fortunately, I found my way through with resources in the form of educational courses, knowledgeable horse people, and riding lessons.

The success of HorsePlay Therapy Center has been driven by the commitment of so many parents of special needs kids who refused to believe that their child had achieved all that was possible. They believe in what isn't possible. It doesn't make sense that a child who was born without functional use of his legs is now walking, or that a non-verbal child is now talking, Or a child who easily overstimulates and melts down in public can now go to a restaurant with their family and sit calmly for a meal. These are common occurrences with therapy at Horseplay Therapy Center.

Mission statement

HorsePlay Therapy is committed to providing children with special needs and veterans a foundation for developing skills that improve their overall quality of life through hippotherapy and other equine assisted therapies provided in a safe and caring environment. At HorsePlay Therapy Center, no child or veteran is denied the use of horses in their treatment based on their ability to pay.

The recent addition of the Rise Up for Veterans Program in 2021 has given us new inspiration to dive into the needs of veterans with PTSD and other life altering injuries related to military service. We have a vision for Rise Up to be a center where veterans not only receive mental health services, but personalized physical, occupational, and speech therapy services as well. A place where therapy is provided, but also where community activities occur that include an adaptive team fitness program, a community garden, family fun days at the barn, horsemanship training, and therapeutic horseback riding.

Our community needs a program like Rise Up for our veterans, and I believe that when there is vision, there is provision. Thank you for giving your resources to help fund our therapy programs. We couldn't do this without you!

Sincerely,

Vicky Carregal
President & Founder,
HorsePlay Therapy Center



Using Horses to Heal

ABOUT OUR PROGRAMS

HorsePlay Therapy Center is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization, established in 2015 to provide physical, occupational, and speech therapy using hippotherapy to children with special needs. As of 2023, HorsePlay Therapy Center provides over 1,000 therapy sessions a month to children with special needs with diagnoses that include Down Syndrome, Cerebral Palsy, Autism, Traumatic Brain Injury, and other developmental disorders. In late 2020, the Board of Directors of HorsePlay Therapy Center elected to expand the organization's services and team of horses to meet the growing need of another underserved population in our community: wounded warriors and veterans diagnosed with PTSD. With eager persistence and drive to help this population, RiseUp for Veterans was launched quickly after the Board's decision, on November 11th, 2021.



SERVING CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Hippotherapy provides multiple benefits for children with special needs, that includes balance and postural control, sensory input, and respiratory support for speech production, just to name a few. The emotional connection that the horses provide lead to improved confidence and social-emotional well-being in both our children and veterans alike. Our innovative therapy for children and veterans enhances traditional therapy by allowing participants to experience a special connection- sensory and physical- with their horse and the nature that surrounds them as they work towards their goals.

SERVING VETERANS

With our veterans, equine-assisted therapy uses horses to promote psychological, occupational, physical, and spiritual healing in individuals suffering from a variety of emotional and physical ailments. Experts in equine-assisted therapy, as well as participants, believe that the many shared traits between horses and humans promote open, trusting and nonthreatening physical and emotional connections between both groups. The mission of RiseUp for Veterans is to enhance the quality of life for our service men and women and their families by bringing horses and people together through a comprehensive equine-assisted therapy program, staffed by certified instructors, licensed clinical therapists, licensed mental health professionals, and trained volunteers.

"HorsePlay Therapy has provided a steady progression. Both boys (sons) would become stagnant in other environments. The therapists show love and support for the boys!"

- Parent of a HorsePlay participant

"Now, I have something to connect to, I have the horse to connect to. Before, it was just sitting down and talking across the table. Now, I have something to gauge my emotions with: the horse." - Rise Up Veteran

Why Horses?

A common question asked is “Why horses?”. The answer, really, is quite simple: horses are uniquely suited to help build physical and emotional strength. The multi-dimensional movement of the horse re-creates the human gait, helping children gain the sensory experience of walking. Horses are dynamic, sensitive animals that communicate through the subtle use of body language. They respond to emotional situations giving immediate, honest feedback, without judgment and with unconditional acceptance. Along with our skilled team of therapists, a little horsepower helps us empower our participants to achieve their goals to attain a greater quality of life. At HorsePlay Therapy Center, no child or veteran is denied use of horses in their therapy based on ability to pay.

EAT DEFINITION

Equine-Assisted Therapy (E.A.T.) encompasses a range of treatments that involve activities with horses to promote human physical and mental health. E.A.T. uses horses to promote psychological, occupational, physical, and spiritual healing in individuals suffering from a variety of emotional and physical ailments.

HIPPOTHERAPY DEFINITION

Hippotherapy is physical therapy, occupational therapy, and speech therapy that uses equine movement as a treatment strategy. Hippotherapy increases gross motor functions, fine motor skills, sensory integration, as well as improves language processing and speech production.

Common Diagnoses Treated at HorsePlay Therapy include:

- Autism
- Apraxia of Speech
- Sensory Processing Disorders
- Attention Deficit Disorder
- Down Syndrome
- Cerebral Palsy
- Various genetic disorders
- Developmental Delays
- Traumatic Brain Injury
- Spinal Cord Injury
- Hypotonia
- Receptive and Expressive Language Delays and Disorders
- Abnormal gait

HorsePlay Our Kids' Program Provides:

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

A child who comes to Horseplay Therapy Center for occupational therapy works one on one with a therapist to improve fine motor skills and work on activities of daily living. Activities of daily living include socializing and playing appropriately with other children, dressing, self feeding, and more. Fine motor skills include stacking blocks, doing puzzles, holding a pencil or crayon, and using a spoon, or fork. We also help those with sensory processing issues to participate more actively in their home and school environments. Occupational Therapists use different positioning on the horse to maximize balance, coordination, weight bearing, and timing. They combine therapy activities on the horse with fun therapeutic activities off of the horse to achieve the greatest outcomes.

PHYSICAL THERAPY

A child who comes to Horseplay Therapy Center for physical therapy will work one-on-one with a therapist to increase gross motor function. A child in PT may work on skills such as head control, sitting balance, crawling, standing, walking, going up and downstairs, jumping, running, or walking on a balance beam. On horseback, the therapist uses different positions to work different muscle groups. The horse's movement naturally challenges the rider's balance and coordination. Horses walk similarly to how humans walk, so a child who is non-ambulatory is able to feel the body movements associated with walking. By riding the horse and feeling the repetitive motion of the horse's walk, a non-ambulatory child can often learn to walk themselves. Our physical therapists spend time working off of the horse as well as on the horse for maximized results.

SPEECH THERAPY

A child who comes to Horseplay Therapy Center for speech therapy works one-on-one with a Speech-Language Pathologist to improve receptive language, expressive language skills, cognitive language skills, pragmatic skills, fluency, production of speech sounds, and speech intelligibility. Communication is an integral part of being involved and connected in our families, social circles, and development of independence in familiar and novel environments. Our speech-language pathologists utilize the repetitive, rhythmical, organized movement of the horse to facilitate appropriate sensory integration and language organization. The movement of the horse also activates core muscles, creating appropriate diaphragmatic breath support for phonation. Our therapists utilize activities both mounted and unmounted for ultimate results in and out of the barn.



“HorsePlay Camp was a highlight of our summer! Hope is still talking about water beads, her new friends, and the horses. She (and I) wanted camp to last forever! A total blessing to us!”

- Parent of a current HorsePlay participant and 2023 Breeder's Cup camper



Rise Up

Our Veterans Program Provides:

EQUINE-ASSISTED THERAPY (EAT)

Equine-assisted therapy can be the difference between life and death for a veteran. HorsePlay Therapy Center offers comprehensive clinical support services for veterans. Both mounted and unmounted activities in equine-assisted therapy, led by a licensed mental health therapist certified in equine therapy, helps rebuild the trust and connection vital to physically and emotionally wounded veterans.

UN-MOUNTED PSYCHOTHERAPY

Individual and group therapy for wounded warriors and veterans diagnosed with PTSD is offered in an open-air equine environment, led by a licensed licensed mental health professional specializing in veteran PTSD.

MARRIAGE & FAMILY THERAPY

One of the greatest struggles for veterans is re-entry into civilian life. As part of individual counseling for wounded warriors and veterans diagnosed with PTSD, part of the therapy program involves spouses, significant others, and veteran's children, along with our team of horses. Therapy sessions are led by a licensed licensed mental health professional specializing in veteran PTSD. Equine-Assisted Therapy allows a safe place to feel and address emotions through the animal-human bond and connects families and loved ones in a rehabilitative equine environment.

STATS INVOLVING SPECIAL NEEDS

- According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), about 1 in 36 children has been identified with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) according to estimates from CDC's Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring (ADDM) Network. ASD is reported to occur in all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups. **ASD is nearly 4 times more common among boys than among girls.**
- "Nearly **1 in 12 U.S. children** ages 3-17 has had a disorder related to voice, speech, language, or swallowing. Nearly half of U.S. children ages 3-17 with a voice, speech, language, or swallowing disorder have not received intervention services in the past year." (American Speech-Language Hearing Association)
- The Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring (ADDM) reports that 1 in 323 children have some form of cerebral palsy.

STATS INVOLVING VETERANS

- With a population of 19,623 veterans living in St. Johns County, FL, 20% (3,924) of these veterans are diagnosed with PTSD, according to the Veterans Council of St. Johns County.
- $\frac{2}{3}$ of veterans diagnoses with Traumatic Brain Injury also have PTSD
- 21 veterans commit suicide each day in the United States
- 23% of female veterans were victims of sexual assault and military sexual trauma when in the military.

Milestones

- **2013:** Established a team of clinicians to provide early intervention services and began researching and exploring hippotherapy
- **2015:** HorsePlay Therapy Center was established and began providing hippotherapy to 10 children per week.
- **2016:** HorsePlay Therapy Center grew to 30 therapy visits per week, relocated to a more localized barn, acquired 3 therapy horses
- **2018:** Increased therapy to 80 visits per week, moved to an 11 acre property with 10 stalls, 3 child centered therapy rooms, and space to grow
- **2019:** Received a \$100,000 donation from Kacey Musgraves for covered arena, increased therapy sessions to 100 sessions/week
- **2020:** Built a 80x152 covered arena; grew program to 150 visits per week; built a handicapped accessible bathroom; began raising funds to launch the RiseUp for Veterans program with the help of guest speaker Lt. General William "Jerry" Boykin;
- **2021:** Increased therapy sessions to 225 per week; received a \$100,000 donation to secure a new barn location for the RiseUp for Veterans program to be built; hired mental health therapists specializing in veteran PTSD and launched the RiseUp program on Veterans Day, November 11th, 2021. Launched our Breeder's cup special needs camp
- **2022:** Increased children's therapy sessions to 250 per week; started group and individual therapy sessions for Veterans; began visits from the Wounded Warrior Project Odyssey, acquired a horse for the RiseUp equine team; extended the HorsePlay barn to add a stall and a covered sitting area;
- **2023:** Moved our RiseUp program into Quillow Acres; Secured a \$20,000 grant to provide therapies to uninsured veterans; Established a new treatment room for our pediatric program, acquired 3 horses for the Veterans program and 1 new horse for our pediatric program, grew our RiseUp treatments to 20 individual visits per week, Grew our summer camp program to include a special needs sibling camp, held our first-ever educational course through the O.K. Corral Series.



Envisioning for the future

TRIPLE CROWN (Kids' program) • WE WILL:

- Create more treatment rooms and a sensory gym that meets our physical, occupational, and speech therapists' needs
- Acquire 3 more horses appropriate for hippotherapy treatment
- Build new structures to meet our growing equine team's needs
- Weatherize the arena

RISEUP FOR VETERANS • WE WILL:

- Create a facility that meets veteran needs for PT, OT, ST, and psychotherapy
- Erect a covered arena
- Establish handicap parking and handicap accessibility

Partnerships

- St. Johns County VA Clinic
- Wounded Warrior Project
- HEAL Foundation
- Kouns Family Foundation
- Indianhead Soils and Exploration
- Ansaarie Cardiac and Endovascular
- GATE Foundation
- Builder's Care
- Junior Service League of St. Augustine

"You can interact with the horse and feel yourself through the animal as you're interacting with them. It's been a very important difference, you know. You have something that will love you unconditionally" - Rise Up Veteran



How to get involved

- To get involved as a participant, please have your primary care physician or child's pediatrician send a referral to Next Step Therapy Services for mental health services if you are a veteran, or PT, OT or speech for children.
- To volunteer, reach out to horseplaytherapycenter@gmail.com
- We host community events regularly, including our annual Fall Festival and BBQ and Beer at the Barn. Follow us on social media and come join us!

Contact Us

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Horseplaytherapy.org

HorsePlay Therapy offers scholarships to families who need financial assistance. We accept tax deductible donations.

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