

Program Evaluation

Ethan Johnstone, Roxanne Walker, Brittney Brown, and ML Stemkowski

Winthrop University

Programs and Population

RideAbility is a non-profit organization in York County South Carolina that offers free or reduced cost equine assisted therapy to children with special needs to promote the physical, emotional, social, and spiritual well-being of both participants and their families. The program is a therapeutic horseback riding program for children living with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Down Syndrome, Muscular Dystrophy, visual/hearing impairments, and other learning/developmental disabilities. Therapeutic horseback riding is considered a recreational therapy.

Through horseback riding, the mission is for clients to gain physical, emotional, and mental rewards. Physical rewards include improvements in flexibility, balance, and muscle strength. In addition to the physical benefits, riding naturally also boosts self-esteem and confidence promoting a heightened sense of self-worth. RideAbility sets goals with the clients to meet the following criteria: balance/strength, focus/attention, socialization, riding/horsemanship skills, and improved confidence and self-esteem. This write up is a component of an overall outcome evaluation of RideAbility's Therapeutic Horseback Riding program.

Goals

One of goals of RideAbility is to teach horsemanship skills to the extent of each student's ability, in a fun, educational, and recreational way. Many benefits carry over into their daily lives. Their families, friends, and teachers are just a few that are directly affected in a positive way. The Therapeutic Riding Program has multiple expected outcomes, both short and long-term. The goals of the organization are to provide services to as many children with special needs in the community as possible, providing them the opportunity to develop to their greatest potential. Another goal of the program is to maintain a commitment to play a leading role in improving the lives and well-being of clients regardless of the client's ability to pay. Lastly, they

are continuously evaluating the program and program development to maintain the desired the outcomes.

Theory

RideAbility's theory is that by providing free horseback riding lessons to children living with disabilities, these children will feel empowered regardless of economic status, oppression, or disability. In recent years, more and more studies have set out to study the effects of equine therapy with certain populations. Studies show that equine therapy is an effective treatment for individuals with a variety of disabilities. A study by Bass, Duchowny, and Llabre (2009) show that "autistic children exposed to therapeutic horseback riding exhibited greater sensory seeking, sensory sensitivity, social motivation, and less inattention, distractibility, and sedentary behaviors" (p. 1261). A review of the literature shows that equine therapy offers a "significant positive impact for every group studied" (Palaestra, 2017). While future research is still needed, equine therapy is an exciting, emerging, and effective field of study and practice. This activity becomes their outdoor exercise and offers them an opportunity to socialize with others and feel part of a "team."

Funding and Eligibility

RideAbility is a United Way partner agency. The program receives funding through United Way. There are 21 United Way eligibility requirements that the agency must prove annually through a competitive process. Through various yearly applications and continued data collection, United Way is able to see the progression and the need for this agency. Through funding from United Way and generous donations from the community, the program is offered regardless of a client's ability to pay. There are four 12 week sessions per year and each session is a total of \$480. Through previous data collection, it was found that nearly 95% of riders

continue to ride for more than one session due to the therapeutic benefits they achieve. It costs \$1,920 for the year for a rider to participate. For most clients, this cost is extremely out of the question and options are needed. Through the original application process clients submit income verification for the agency to determine the best option per client. A sliding scale is provided as well as flexibility when the client is able to pay, no matter how minimal, they give what they can.

Practice Evaluation Process

RideAbility's evaluations consist of a Results Oriented Outcome Evaluation. The client is evaluated both pre and post series, and benchmark goals are evaluated to determine the client's improvement throughout their session. For specific details, progress is documented weekly in the lesson review and lesson plan. Noting challenges and strengths while also documenting skills to build on and improve for the next lesson is part of the evaluation of each client's progress. RideAbility staff also hold meetings with the parents to discuss improvements and set goals. They also keep open communication with the rider's physical therapist, occupational therapist, and teachers, along with attending IEP (individual education plan) meetings if needed. Involved in this evaluation is a full-time licensed Equine Therapist who works with a number of funders for continued support of the growth of RideAbility.

Corporate and Community Partners:

United Way of York County

Lutz Foundation of Chester

Williams and Fudge, Inc.

Foundation for the Carolina's FFTC

Lake Wylie Clover Mayday Project

Family Trust Credit Union

Junior Welfare League

York County Community Foundation

York Electric Round-Up

Lake Wylie Lions Club

Sweet Repeat

Dover Saddlery

Robert Johnson Foundation

Bank of America

Divine Horse Tack

Gibson Lawn Care

Cherokee Three Farms

Mobile Horse/Southeast Horse Supplies

Walmart

Regulatory Agencies include:

Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship, P.A.T.H. international.

Logic Model

Project: Therapeutic Riding Program					
Goal: To promote healthy lifestyles and improve functional ability of children and adults with special needs					
INPUTS	ACTIVITIES	OUTPUTS	OUTCOMES		
What we invest	What we do	Who we reach	Why this project: short-term results	Why this project: intermediate results	Why this project: long-term results
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 PATH certified staff member • 65 staff hours per week • horse feed & grooming equipment • handicap assistance equipment • 10 horses • # acre land and riding center • funding from grant sources • CEUs for conferences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • train volunteers & instructors • coordinate volunteers • train horses • teach horsemanship skills • conduct riding lessons • establish lesson plans • conduct re-evaluations • recruit volunteers • outreach to community • form partnerships in community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 50 volunteers per week • 65 clients served/week • 50 families served/week • 10 horses trained • 50 families receiving TAP • 1 instructor trained • 200 people read newsletter • 18 partnerships formed • Outreach to 330 people • School impact 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 78% confidence/self-esteem increase • 80% learn horsemanship skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 65% improve communication skills • 80% improve socialization skills • 80% improve listening skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 75% improve functional abilities • 80% achieve healthier lifestyle
<p>Assumptions The riding center will continue to let us use their space. Families receiving TAP will be motivated to continue lessons. We will consistently have enough volunteers necessary to operate.</p>			<p>External Factors Funding availability Limited or emerging research on evidence-based practice Rotation and season affects volunteer consistency.</p>		

Narrative Logic Model

The revised RideAbility Logic Model for the Therapeutic Riding Program provides a more in depth picture of the resources that go into the program, activities that take place, participants that are impacted, and potential outcomes of the program. Included in the logic model are four key components that align with each of the above; inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes. Inputs are resources that an agency or program already has that go into the program, such as staff, funding, equipment, space, and time. Activities include things that take place in order for the program to run, such as recruitment, outreach, planning, and providing classes. Outputs are represented through the number of people and things impacted, or the quantified product of the activities, such as the number of clients who received or completed the program or the number of agencies that partnered in the program. Outcomes are measured in short term, intermediate, and long term results. These are the actual impacts that the program has on the clients, families, or communities.

Inputs

RideAbility has several resources already available that enable them to provide this program and achieve their goal. They have one P.A.T.H. certified staff member who spends at least 65 hours preparing for and providing program activities. They have 10 horses and the space to care for the horses and conduct lessons. They have the equipment necessary for lessons on horses, such as saddles, wheelchair lifts as well as materials to care for the horses, including feed and grooming materials. In addition to these resources, they have some funding available to provide the programming and cover some operating costs.

Activities

A number of activities must take place to run the program. Volunteers must be recruited and trained. Once the volunteers are trained, they must be coordinated to assist with programming. Instructors must be trained. Horses must be trained. Outreach to the community is conducted, including writing and publishing a newsletter. Initial rider profiles and assessments are conducted for clients. Re-evaluations take place at a certain point for clients. Horsemanship skills are taught to clients and riding lessons are provided. Partnerships with other agencies and institutions are created in the community.

Outputs

From the inputs and the activities, the program is able to have an impact on a certain number of people and agencies within the community. Through their program, RideAbility impacts 50 volunteers, 65 clients, and 50 families per week. About 50 families receive tuition assistance. Another impact is 10 trained horses and 1 additional trained instructor. At least 200 community members read their newsletter per month and 18 partnerships are formed within the community. Additionally, several local schools are impacted because of their students being involved in or volunteering with the program. Through community outreach such as speaking at events, the program reaches about 330 additional community members per year.

Outcomes

Three different levels of outcomes are included in the logic model; short term, intermediate, and long term. The short term outcomes include changes in learning and beliefs. Intermediate outcomes include changes in some behaviors. Long term outcomes are those that have an impact on overall way of living and are more sustainable. For the Therapeutic Riding Program, the short term outcomes are that 80% of clients will learn new horsemanship skills and that 78% will have an increase in their self-confidence or self-esteem. Intermediate outcomes are

that 65% of clients will have an improvement in their communication skills, socialization skills, and listening skills. The long term results are that 75% of clients will show improvement in their functional abilities, including balance, core strength, motor skills, decision-making, judgement, and independence. Another long term outcome is that 80% will develop and maintain a healthy lifestyle.

Assumptions

Some assumptions are made through this program. These include the riding center will continue to allow RideAbility to use their space, families receiving TAP will be motivated to continue lessons, and RideAbility will consistently have enough volunteers necessary to operate.

External Factors

Certain factors outside of RideAbility's control may affect their ability to continue offering the program. These include limited funding availability, limited or emerging research on the evidence-based practice of therapeutic horseback riding, and the rotation and season effects on volunteer consistency.

References

- Bass, M., Duchowny, C, & Llabre, M. (2009). The effect of therapeutic horseback riding on social functioning in children with autism. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 39*, 1261-1267.
- N.A. (2017). Study backs therapeutic benefits of horseback riding. *Palaestra, 3*(31).