

Riding as therapy

By Audrey Perri
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New York Therapeutic Riding Center (NYTRC), at Claremont Riding Academy on 89th Street, has been aiding disabled children and adults since 1998 and provides positive physical therapy results.

Bellevue Hospital patient Gregory VanDunk is a NYTRC adult student who has traumatic brain injury due to an auto accident in 1985. Over the past two years, he has improved his balance and focus as a result of therapeutic horseback riding, according to his mother Yvonne Waller. She says that he looks forward to riding every week.

"Ever since he started riding he walks so much better and sits up tall," said Waller. "Everything is so beneficial."

Crystal Orihucla, 6, has cerebral palsy and posture issues. NYTRC's physical therapist said Crystal has developed natural riding skills that have helped her posture.

Dr. David Feldman, Chief of Pediatric Orthopedic Surgery at the Hospital for Joint Diseases in Manhattan, said therapeutic riding is valuable in many ways for children with disabilities.



(AUDREY PERRI)

Crystal Orihucla has a therapeutic riding lesson at the New York Therapeutic Riding Center.

"It encourages confidence, a feeling of freedom and mobility and is beneficial for their musculature, as well as for posture and hip positioning. Therapeutic riding is a wonderful adjunctive therapy in these children's lives," he said.

"We serve kids and adults with disabilities living in the five boroughs of New York City," said Richard Brodie, executive director of NYTRC. "We are here at Claremont because it is central to the New York metropolitan area."

NYTRC is looking for a facility of their own in order

to help more disabled children and adults.

Therapeutic riding classes are staffed with a therapeutic riding instructor, a physical therapist and dedicated volunteers, who are the backbone of the program.

The students learn how to ride a horse and work on their particular rehabilitation goals. Therapeutic riding classes meet once a week all year round, with a focus on children during the summer.

"What it does for these people is amazing," said an NYTRC volunteer. "It's thrilling to see the progress"

Several city and state government agencies are utilizing NYTRC to expand their service capabilities. Some of these government agencies provide sponsorships or scholarships for children and adults with disabilities participating in the NYTRC program.

Brodie said that the Rusk Institute, a division of NYU Medical Center, works with NYTRC and recognizes the tremendous potential in helping children with cerebral palsy through therapeutic riding.