



NARHA™

North American Riding for the Handicapped Association, Inc.

*Appreciating the power of the horse to
change lives™*

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organization

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About NARHA

Mission

NARHA changes lives by promoting excellence in equine assisted activities.

NARHA

Since 1969, the North American Riding for the Handicapped Association, Inc. (NARHA), has provided Equine Assisted Activity and Therapy (EAAT) programs in the United States and Canada through its network of nearly 800 member centers. Each year, dozens of new centers initiate new programs and more than 38,000 individuals with disabilities benefit from activities which include therapeutic riding, hippotherapy, equine assisted psychotherapy, driving, interactive vaulting, and competition.

Headquartered in Denver, Colorado, NARHA's mission is to "change and enrich lives by promoting excellence in equine assisted activities." To accomplish this mission, NARHA fosters safe, professional, ethical and therapeutic equine activities through education, communication, research and standards. The association ensures its standards are met through an accreditation process for centers and a certification process for instructors.

A section of NARHA, the Equine Facilitated Mental Health Association (EFMHA), founded in 1996, provides equine-facilitated psychotherapy (EFP) for people with psychological issues and mental health needs, including anxiety, depression, and autism. EFP is facilitated by a licensed, credentialed mental health professional that works with an appropriately credentialed equine professional, or is dually credentialed as an equine professional.

History

The therapeutic value of horseback riding goes back

centuries although the origin of organized therapeutic riding is relatively recently. The achievements of Liz Hartel of Denmark are generally regarded as the impetus for the formation of therapeutic riding centers in Europe. Polio impaired Hartel's mobility but not her spirit. In 1952, she won the silver medal for Grand Prix dressage at the Helsinki Olympics. Medical and equine professionals took notice and soon centers for therapeutic riding sprang up in Europe.

Canadians and Americans studied what was happening in England and quickly made plans to start centers. Two of the first were the Community Association of Riding for the Disabled (CARD) in Toronto, Ontario, organized by J.J. Bauer and Dr. R.E. Renaud, and the Cheff Center for the Handicapped in Augusta, Michigan, with Lida McCowan as executive director.

Recognizing the need for an organization to act as a clearinghouse for information on therapeutic riding, 23 individuals gathered at the Red Fox Inn in Middleburg, Virginia on November 2, 1969, and laid the groundwork for NARHA. Today, many medical professionals, including the American Physical Therapy Association and the American Occupational Therapy Association, recognize the therapeutic value of equine assisted activities.

NARHA Today

In its ongoing support of research and education in EAAT, NARHA hosts a four-day annual conference that draws nearly 700 national and international participants to share the latest studies and advances in the field of equine assisted activities. October 29- November 1, 2008 in Hartford, CT attendees will convene to celebrate the theme of "*Lengthening our Strides*". In addition, each of NARHA's 11 regions hosts an annual conference that promotes continuing education for EAAT professionals and adherence to NARHA standards.

To further advance the study of the effectiveness of EAAT, NARHA publishes a quarterly publication, STRIDES, and encourages ongoing research. Most recently NARHA published *Resources for Research and Education in Equine Assisted Activities & Therapy*, a comprehensive 100-page international bibliography, compiled by Beth Macauley, Ph.D., CC-SLIP, HPCS. In 2006, NARHA was awarded a \$5,000 Quality of Life Grant from the Christopher Reeve Foundation to develop *The Parental and Professional Information Resource Guide*.

Last year, two NARHA centers and one NARHA Advanced Riding Instructor offered pilot therapeutic riding programs to wounded U.S. veterans, demonstrating how broadly the umbrella of EAAT can touch people's lives. The sessions were so successful that Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C. is considering adding therapeutic riding to its rehabilitation program.

With the explosion of interest in EAAT, NARHA centers and EAAT have been spotlighted in numerous national magazines, such as *Reader's Digest*, *Practical Horseman*, and *Blaze Magazine* and TV shows, including *Good Morning America* and the *Saddle Club* TV series. *Palaestra Magazine*, which covers issues related to athletes with disabilities, launched in 2006 a regular department written by NARHA's

Health & Education Committee called “Humans, Horses and Health.” NARHA’s Horse Ambassador, Nevada Joe, a former wild mustang adopted by Ernie and Diane Purcelli, continues to give therapeutic riding demonstrations at shows throughout the U.S.

Future Trends

In response to this public attention, EAAT, NARHA has increased its support to regions and centers and reorganized its center accreditation and instructor certification procedures. Currently NARHA certifies instructors in three specialty areas--Riding, Driving and Interactive Vaulting—and is developing a certification for a fourth specialty, Equine Specialist. In the next decade, the association expects the rapid interest in driving to accelerate and foresees increasing growth in the Equine Specialist area.

As one of the global authorities in the EAAT field, NARHA belongs to the worldwide Federation for Riding for the Disabled International (FRDI). NARHA has been certifying instructors outside the U.S. for many years and has four international center members. However, in 2006 NARHA welcomed its first accredited center outside of North America, the Fundació Teràpia A C@vall in Barcelona, Spain, and expects that this kind of global accreditation will only expand.

For the next three to five years, NARHA will be focusing on tactics to achieve the three major goals outlined in a strategic plan that was launched in 2006: (1) Enhancing NARHA’s leadership capabilities within the EAAT industry, (2) providing greater value and more effective service to members and (3) building the infrastructure to enhance capacity for organizational growth.

NARHA is proud to provide opportunities for people with varying ability levels to challenge themselves physically and emotionally and to set goals to improve their quality of life via the horse. Training professionals to support and facilitate this process, educating the public about the positive impact of the human/animal bond and setting national standards for safe and effective equine facilitated therapy/activities will continue to dictate NARHA's growth.

Who is Served by NARHA's Members?

Individuals with the following disabilities commonly participate and benefit from equine facilitated therapy and activities:

- Muscular Dystrophy
- Cerebral Palsy
- Visual Impairment
- Down Syndrome
- Mental Retardation
- Autism
- Multiple Sclerosis
- Spina Bifida
- Emotional Disabilities
- Brain Injuries
- Spinal Cord Injuries
- Amputations
- Learning Disabilities
- Attention Deficit Disorder

Deafness
Cardiovascular accident/Stroke

The North American Riding for the Handicapped Association serves a membership of 5,500 individuals and over 730 NARHA programs around the country. More than 5000 specially screened and trained horses make safe interactions possible.

NARHA assists individuals and centers in several ways:

CENTER ACCREDITATION/INSTRUCTOR CERTIFICATION

These programs ensure the high quality and safe instruction offered by NARHA therapeutic riding centers across the U.S. and Canada.

EDUCATION

Through workshops and conferences, NARHA provides information to those interested in equine facilitated therapy and activities. NARHA's annual national conference brings experts from the fields of physical therapy, horse care, fund raising, business management, and volunteer training - to name a few.

ADVOCACY

NARHA's efforts to increase awareness of therapeutic riding and other equine facilitated therapy and activities results in more than 31,000 phone calls every year to our toll-free number. The popular communication mode of the email has seen a slight reduction in telephone calls this past year, but has resulted in an increase of NARHA communication via the World Wide Web.

NARHA'S STRIDES:

All members of NARHA receive NARHA STRIDES four times a year. This engaging magazine is a non-technical, yet accurate journal that focuses on the work of NARHA. Rider profiles, how-to articles, editorials and instructional columns seek to educate a general readership of the diverse aspects of equine facilitated therapy and activities. Each seasonal issue carries a theme.

NARHA NEWS:

Every month *NARHA News* reaches the membership with internal information such as board updates, committee and region reports, accreditation issues and classified ads. This is an electronic newsletter which helps keep our costs down.

rev 06/12/2008

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