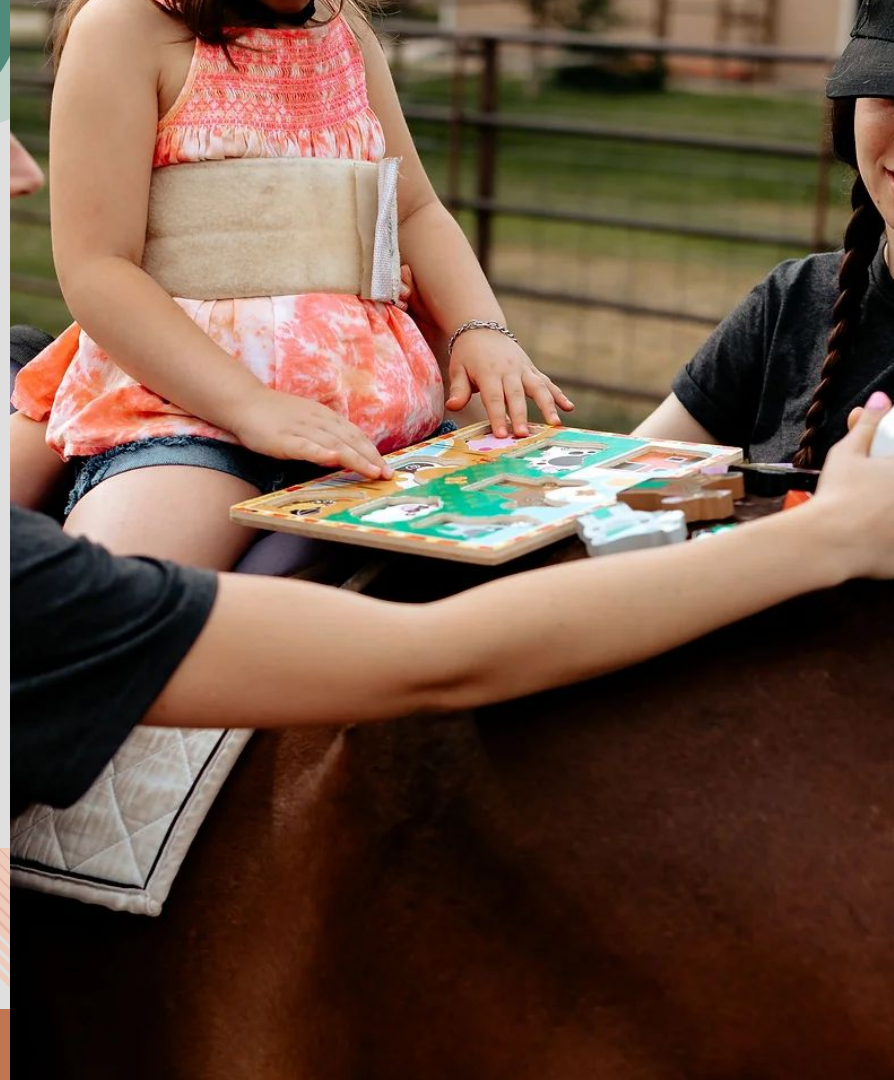




How A Horse Can Help YOU



An Honors Thesis By Molly Hancock



Where It All Started...

I have had a dream the last 2 years...

- My Junior year of college I realized I wanted to do Equine Assisted Occupational Therapy.
- Volunteered at a practice in high school.
- I quickly found no one knew what it was.....

The Why...

I realized that not many people know what Equine Assisted Occupational Therapy is and I wanted to spread awareness.

- I wanted to share my dream with others.
- It works and it's a great resource.
- A practice for people by people



My Drive

- Educate
- Accessible
- Interactive
- Summary
- Resource
- Welcoming and warm



I Didn't Know as Much As I Thought

The Harsh Truth

- I beat myself up
- An opportunity to learn
- I was getting closer to my dreams.
- Still getting to attain my original goal

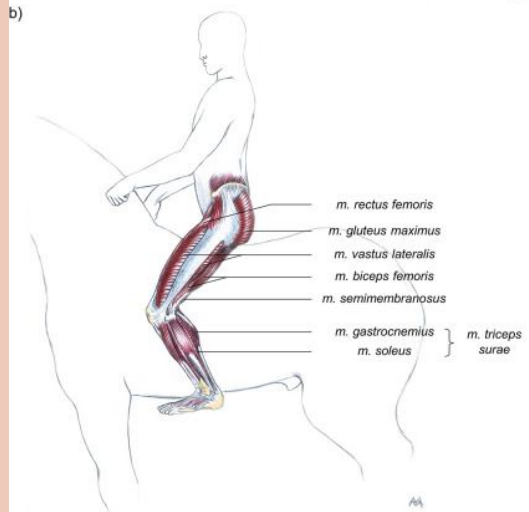
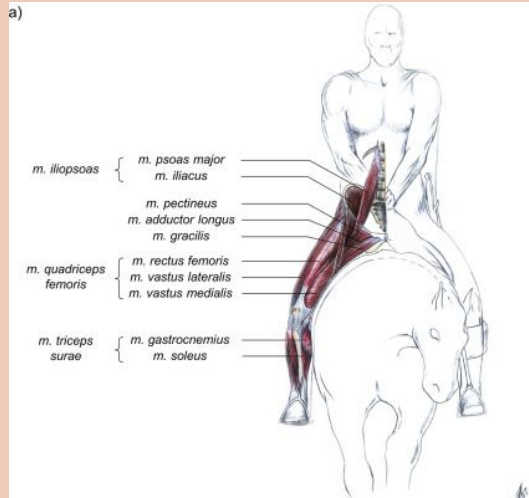




Extra Knowledge

All of a horse's gaits whether it's a walk, trot, or canter, produces rhythmic and repetitive movements that closely mimic the natural motion of a human's walk. When a person rides their body responds to the horse's movements,

This can help improve balance, coordination, core strength and relaxes and normalizes muscle tone and joint flexibility.



Core Muscles


- Transverse abdominis
- Obliques
- Rectus abdominis “six pack”
- Multifidus
- Erector spinae

Lower extremity muscles

- Quadriceps
- Hamstrings
- Gluteus Maximus
- Gluteus Medius
- Gastrocnemius “calves”
- Adductor Brevis, Longus, Magnus
- Hip Intrinsic muscles - Superior and Inferior
- Quadratus Femoris Gemellus Obturator Internus

Other muscles

- Biceps Femoris

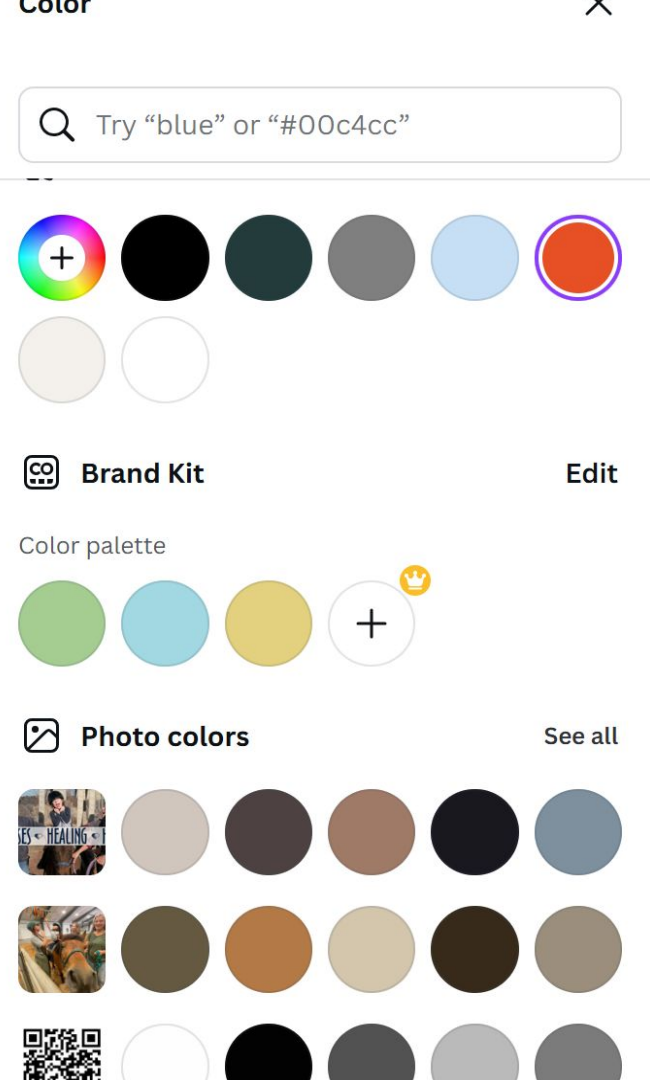


Movement-Based Stimulation: Riding helps strengthen neural connections related to physical coordination.

Enhanced Neuroplasticity: Neuroplasticity, the brain's ability to reorganize and form new neural connections, is encouraged through the repetitive, rhythmic movements of riding.

Help Regulate Emotions and Negate Negative Behavior: Reducing stress hormones and increasing the release of oxytocin and dopamine, neurotransmitters involved in mood regulation.

Sensory Integration and Cognitive Engagement: Working with horses requires multiple senses to be engaged at once which can be especially beneficial for individuals with sensory processing disorders or autism. The varied sensory input helps integrate these sensations, which can improve focus, reaction times, and cognitive processing.



Proces

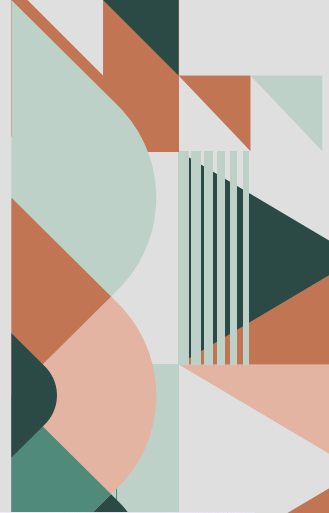


How I made my project.





- I used Canva
- I started designing and decorating
- No camera no permission
- Compiled days of research
- Paraphrasing
- Filling in



Canva

Design made easy, and free



Volunteer Work





A Whole New Perspective

- I loved the work
- I started at My Heroes but transitioned to Iron Horse Therapeutic Farm
- After research I looked for skills and tools.
- I have been struggling with mental health yet helping others and being around animals reminds me animal therapy does work





Reflection

A look back at all I have done



- I wrote a 4 page paper on my experiences as a whole
- If I were to change anything it would be to start volunteering sooner
- This presentation serves to showcase my paper and more.



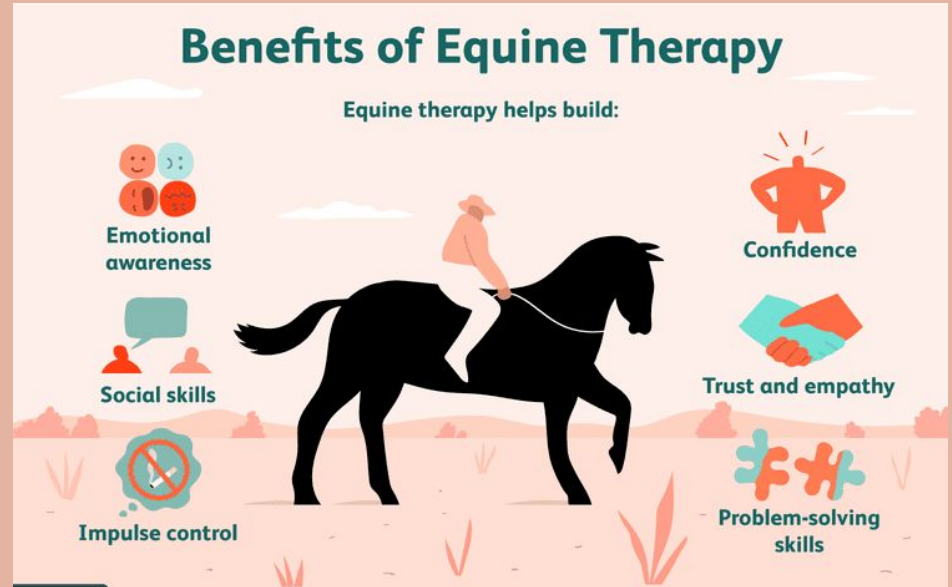
Getting to work with clients first hand has solidified my love for OT, I find myself being enthralled by the techniques and wanting to learn more. I love the people and the horses. I feel fulfilled.



Wrapping up

Overall My Honors Thesis Consists of

- A three sided pamphlet
- Accessory page to pamphlet
- 4 Page reflection paper
- 15 minute summative slideshow presentation



What a Typical Equine Assisted Therapy Session Looks Like?

Each program is tailored to the client's needs but often includes greeting and grooming the horse, followed by riding exercises that improve balance, coordination, and sensory processing. Session can include other therapy tools and toys as well used while riding. Sessions end with calming activities, reinforcing the therapeutic bond.

Different Types of Equine assisted Therapy

Physical Therapy in an Equine Environment (PTEE)

In PTEE, the horse acts as a dynamic tool, offering rhythmic, natural walking-like motion. This movement activates core muscles, enhances balance, and refines posture and coordination, creating a supportive, engaging therapy environment. This practice benefits individuals with physical, neurological, and developmental conditions seeking improved mobility and stability.

What is Equine Assisted Therapy?

Equine-Assisted Therapy (EAT)

is a therapy that involves interactions with horses to help improve physical, emotional, and social well-being. Through activities like grooming, riding, or simply being around horses, individuals can work on skills such as balance, coordination, communication, emotional regulation, cognitive improvement and self-confidence. EAT is often used for people with a wide range of conditions, including physical disabilities, mental health challenges, developmental disorders, and trauma, to promote healing and personal growth. In Colorado EAT is covered by insurance as long as a licensed therapist is there.

Now EAT is covered by Medicare!

How a Horse Can Help YOU

A Toolkit to learn about Equine Assisted Therapy



Why Should You Volunteer?

Volunteering isn't just about helping others who need your help, it's something we do for ourselves too. Research shows giving time to a cause or community brings a real sense of purpose and can boost our mood and reduce stress. When we volunteer, we actually release "feel good" chemicals, like dopamine, that can genuinely make people happier. Plus, it connects with others and teaches new skills, making our lives feel richer and more fulfilling in the process.

My Heroes Therapy



Iron Horse Therapeutic Farm



Hearts and Horses



Scan the QR code to Visit Local Equine Therapy Websites



Resources Used

Interested in Helping the Fort Collins Area?

There are several ways to get involved! Equine assisted therapy relies on the kindness of volunteers to make sessions possible. This includes taking care of horses, leasing your horse, or becoming a side walker and much more! To get started visit **My Heroes at the Temple Grandin Center, Iron Horse Farms, or Hearts and Horses** webpages to learn how to start volunteering. All of these are your local Equine Assisted Therapy Riding Institutes.



Types Continued...

Speech-Language Pathology in an Equine Environment (SLPEE)

SLPEE uses horses as therapeutic partners to help individuals enhance sensory processing and language skills. The horse's presence and movement provide a unique sensory experience, promoting engagement and improving communication abilities in a supportive, interactive environment. This approach is especially beneficial for individuals with language, sensory, and communication challenges.

Occupational Therapy in an Equine Environment (OTEE)

is a type of therapy that uses horseback riding and activities with horses to help people improve skills needed for daily life. It focuses on improving physical movement, emotional well-being, and social interactions. OTEE is often used for people with developmental disabilities, mental health challenges, or those recovering from injuries to boost their quality of life and independence.

Answers From a Licensed Equine Assisted Occupational Therapist



Meet Emily Stockert...

Emily is a CSU graduate and now works at Iron Horse Therapeutic Farm



How has your experience been as an Occupational Therapist?

"It's been an incredible experience. Supporting kids with a wide variety of goals in such a unique setting is so rewarding. The horse adds a special element that provides extra support in a way traditional therapy settings can't."

What sets occupational therapy in an equine environment apart from other forms of OT?

"The horse offers consistent, regulating sensory input. For children with higher sensory needs, it helps them focus on functional activities during the ride. For those with core weakness or postural control issues, the horse naturally builds strength to support these goals. It's an effective, versatile approach that's hard to replicate in a clinic."

What specific skills or therapeutic benefits can clients develop through equine-assisted therapy?

"A wide range! Many kiddos benefit from improved postural control and core strength, which are foundational for movement and functional tasks. It's also a natural way to develop safety awareness and impulse control in an unpredictable environment. Horses connect deeply with humans, helping kids build emotional regulation and form strong bonds that aid in understanding emotions."

How do you assess whether equine-assisted therapy is right for a client?

"We start kids in the clinic for about three months to understand their needs in a controlled environment before transitioning them to the farm."

How do you incorporate horses into therapy and pair clients with them?

"When a child is recommended for equine therapy, we match them with a horse based on their size, support needs, and behaviors. Some horses have smoother movement, while others are more sensitive. It's like solving a puzzle. For us, OT always leads the sessions, sometimes paired with music therapists, but the focus is always on occupational therapy goals with the horse as a tool."

How do you measure progress in equine-assisted therapy?

"It really depends on what their goals are. So we monitor goals similarly to any other patient, we're looking at benchmarks that we're trying to achieve with different skills. We're not necessarily looking at their aptitude in riding a horse."

What challenges arise in equine-assisted therapy?

"Out here it's a much more unpredictable environment than a clinic. A clinic is very regulated. It's very controlled. Sometimes a horse will be injured or need to take a break and we'll have to shift schedules and use a new animal or be flexible in that way. When you're giving your session, you have to be aware of a lot of different factors versus in the clinic when you can just be focused on your child... You really need to be able to fluctuate. There's also cases where you have a friend who's a little bit stubborn, but I try my best not to get in power struggles with kids because I'm the professional. I should be able to pivot and say, okay, well, if we can't address that goal in this way, how can we address it in a way that is engaging to you?"

What long-term benefits have you seen for clients?

"It's a great tool for, for core strengthening, which is like in terms of gross motor, fine motor control, its really beneficial working on balance, coordination, motor planning, body control and awareness, all sorts of things."

How can individuals or organizations get involved or support equine-assisted therapy?

"We rely heavily on volunteers for sidewalking and horse leads. We also need volunteers to host events for our clients and their families. We also do several fundraisers as a non-profit to support costs."

What would you like people to know about occupational therapy in an equine environment?

"OT generally, but specifically in this setting can be an empowering way to help kids and families, reach goals they thought were unattainable, I feel like you see kids out here doing things that they, or their parents never expected. It provides a really unique opportunity for growth for kids and to do it in an environment that gives you a lot of functional life skills in a meaningful way."

If you would like to find out more please check out Iron Horse Therapeutic Farms website and thank you to Emily for this amazing interview!



Thank you

Any questions?



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